

Zoning Redesign: Village Centers
Compilation of Equitable Focus Groups Reports October 4, 2021

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Project Summary

The City of Newton Planning & Development Department held a series of 12 focus groups between May and September 2021 as part of the overall engagement and outreach for the [Zoning Redesign: Village Centers project](#). This phase of the ongoing Zoning Redesign project focusing on village centers began by asking Newton community members to share their experiences of and their future visions for their village centers. The input gathered will help the City of Newton identify areas of research for how to update the zoning for village centers.

Eight focus groups were identified to further equitable engagement in an effort to facilitate outreach with groups of the Newton community that have been underrepresented in our past engagement efforts. When possible, these sessions were co-facilitated with the appropriate Newton board or commission, like the Commission on Disability, Youth Commission, Council on Aging, the Human Rights Commission, and the Newton Housing Authority. Four focus groups were identified for the village center economic development communities, which were co-facilitated by the Newton Economic Development Commission and our consultant, Utile.

Introduction

City staff and the Youth Commission held the Younger People (ages 15-24) focus group on June 3, 2021. In addition, following the focus group, staff reached out to participants who registered but could not attend to hold phone interviews asking the same questions asked during the focus group. 21 people expressed interest in participating through the Focus Group Interest Form. In total this focus group had:

- 15 focus group participants
- 1 interview participant

These sessions were not recorded for participants to feel comfortable and speak freely. What follows below are the “raw” notes compiled by the focus group notetakers and co-facilitators.

Demographics

In Newton, people of ages 15-24 represent 17.21% of the total population according to the 2019 American Community Survey 5-year estimate¹. The distribution of these ages groups is as follows:

- Ages 15 to 19: 10.03% (8,889 / 88,593)
- Ages 20 to 24: 7.17% (6,354 / 88,593)

1

<https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=1600000US2545560&tid=ACST5Y2019.S0101&hidePreview=true> (2020 Census Data is not publicly available yet for these specific age groups.)

Focus Group Notes

Q1: What kinds of values do you want to see present in placemaking? Placemaking describes both built space (building types for retail or mixed use, housing types, accessible sidewalks, etc.) and how the built space is activated through programming and use (can the public use it, is there general meeting space)

- Newton Center is a place where young people congregate
- Everyone should feel welcome- that should be a focus
- Outdoor seating takes away from the feeling that everyone can be there
- Transportation is important- many young people can't drive.
- Why do the bike lanes drop right in Newton Center? It isn't safe, and one person has seen a number of very dangerous crashes involving bikes in Newton Center
- Goes to Panera at least once a week
- Values should be- Healthy, peaceful, relaxing and safe
 - Better lighting
 - more plantings
 - climate resilience & valuing our environment
- Walkability: Auburndale has a big highway interchange. there are some small shops, but it's scary to actually get to them- "it doesn't feel Auburndale gets any love", no outdoor seating, no community feeling except at Starbucks
- Needham St is exactly what not to do- huge road with high-speed cars
 - Shift away from car - centric planning
 - expand sidewalks
 - expand bike paths. lots of kids' bike on sidewalks because they don't feel safe in the street
 - carve out a safe place for skateboarding
 - EV chargers - not just Tesla!
 - traffic calming
- As we come out of covid, we will value open space even more. aesthetic vs functionality- we should consider both, and green infrastructure helps both.
- Chestnut Hill used to have a Ping-Pong table- more fun
 - cornhole, playfulness and street activation
 - Corn hole could also be an art project
- Accessibility - people with bikes, different abilities,
- Have community space - so that it's a more welcoming environment, areas in VCs to bring the community together
- Community - designing spaces to promote interaction between people in the community, benches, open spaces - it's a space for people, and for people to be in and live in as opposed to a more transactional 'just to do this thing or purchase this item'
- Equitability - if you're using contractors, what kinds of businesses & who owns them, to make sure that process gives equal opportunity or more so, equitable opportunity to business owners of color

- Important to make sure there's not a lot of big chain businesses - especially now after Covid and loss of so many local businesses
- Vibrancy - when we're placemaking, public art, community gathering spaces, where we can have public performances and private events where people can just meet up with a bunch of friends to celebrate a birthday.
- Equity - thinking about who feels welcome in a place we make? Never want a segment of our population, because of their race or disability, to make them feel like they're not welcome
- Diversity - which has a lot of meanings, in this case I mean it like - we don't want more of the same. The village centers should have unique pockets within them - we don't need 15 banks in Newton Center, we just don't need them. Diversity and types of places you can find and not just different kinds of businesses but things in addition to businesses, like kinds of art, parks
- Important for them to be forward-looking - not futuristic - I want them to look like they're for the 21st century. The transportation we encourage, the businesses that go there, the institutions we set up - are relevant and things we prioritize in the city in the 21st century. So not having outdated things anymore. Thinking about what commerce + transportation looks like.
- Very segregated by village - I live in Newton Centre - feels weird going into other villages, wishes there was some level of consistency among the village centers. There should be catering to each village center but something that also ties them all together versus being segregated, alone village centers
- Should not have any anti-homeless architecture, make sure spaces are inclusive in that way Village Centers need more bike racks for young people to travel from village center to village center or school to village center etc.
- Village Centers should be welcoming inclusive spaces for all people.
- Lots of young people like to congregate and hangout in village centers; however there are not enough open/dedicated spaces for this.
- Dedicated spaces to just be a young person that is not affiliated with a school or actual building. Example: open space with tables and chairs, green spaces to sit on and play games, spaces for young people to just "be."
- Clear distinct places that allow for socialization (chatting, hanging out), no in between/multi use space like a park or playground.
- Equitable, accessible by many different kinds of people. In all areas, not just in the big mansion areas. Sustainability – designs that are good for the environment, leaves good carbon footprints. General, nice outdoor areas but still accessible by a wide range of folks.

Q2: Based on these values, what do you think Village Centers need to be more equitable for young people and to better fit young people's needs?

- Young people care about climate change- Boston is 4th most vulnerable city in country to damage based on climate change

- I don't drive- I don't ever want to drive a car and while it is feasible to be car-less in Newton, the city could be doing more
- Auburndale commuter station is not ADA accessible. The MBTA is not reliable, and service cuts have had a very negative impact. This makes it hard to move away from using a car, even if you want to. Very interested in using bikes more, but it doesn't feel safe
- Making the city more accessible is good for young people and disabled folks
- If you get rid of parking, maybe people will walk more.
- interest in livable streets/complete streets
- I have dietary restrictions - a lot of places in Newton Center, I'm very limited in where I can go out and eat. Want to support local businesses but find I'm only going to one or two spaces because dietary restrictions leave for desire
- I want more of a scene, especially in terms of nighttime. It's not really enticing - not a lot of enticing places to go out with friends at night or in the afternoon - we talk about going into Boston as the only option we have. Having more spaces for young people to hang out, go to a show or go to a music concert - more opportunities for that.
- Concrete ideas: encourage businesses to stay open later, they close so early in Newton. Shuts down the area.
- More spaces for events and have more events encouraged. To have ones that are not only family events. Went to the Hyde Center a decent amount when younger for family events in the summer - but that equivalent doesn't exist for teenagers in Newton
- Not just have young people survive but thrive in Newton - making the T a more viable option as transportation - gives young people independence, it's sustainable
- Housing of all levels and housing that's affordable for young people to move into. Common experience for Newton young people to be asked by adults, "why don't young people stay here?" It's point blank, too expensive. Especially housing around village centers because if young people don't own a car, which most of us don't, transit and proximity is the main way for us to get around
- Bike infrastructure - biking through Newtonville is terrifying and I hate doing it. I think it's a rite of passage for every Newton North student to get almost hit by a car. It's really sad. We need protected lanes, less parking. Because that's ultimately what gives young people agency and dignity to move.
- Echoes wanting reliable and accessible transit
- Community space with art + fun events where people can gather. Newton gets this rap
- We know we can't live here, so we have to create this image that it's so boring here.
- Works in the toy store in Newtonville - Henry Bear's Park - can't tell you how many times we've had to sadly kick out a group of teenagers because they chilled by our back door but don't feel like they have another place to go
- Echoes housing issue. As a graduate student, I'm really lucky that my girlfriend's mother lets us live in her basement. Otherwise, it's just impossible. We'd like to stay around here, but it's absolutely impossible. In Newton, for older students - there are a ton of graduate programs nearby - so to make it accessible for up to the graduate student age is really important. That would draw a lot more people here - why would I want to live in

Boston, pay a ton of money to live in a teeny tiny place when I could live in Newton and get to my classes on the T?

- As someone who started biking around Newton this year - the place I think about the most is Newton Center which has a parking lot smackd in the middle. At 6 or 7, it's filled with cars. Whether they're getting takeout or whatever, it's a massive traffic jam. Really not an appealing place to bike around then. Especially when there aren't even bike lanes in that area.
- Newton Center too - cost is a big deal. I'd love to get coffee, but I can't pay \$7 for a drink and have to go to Starbucks for a \$4 drink. Things are tremendously expensive here. Wish I was in HS and didn't have to worry about where I was going to park or live or what grocery store I was going to go to. Newton has a good reputation because it's very affluent - there's no hiding that - but also it would be more accessible if generally costs were lower and there were businesses that are sustainable environmentally as well as will stick around (not turn over every 2 years)
- Thinking about Newton Center and the parking lot - a big part of VCs is having it be a circular space - especially can't do that in Newtonville and just how the city is built, can't rebuild everything - but having some sort of communal space where there are businesses around it is important. My friends and I literally sit in the parking lot, because it's just in the middle of Newton Center. Better to sit in a place that's surrounded by businesses than to go to the Senior Center in Newtonville or the Washington park near the New Arts Center - having a community gathering space *inside* the VC
- Newton Center- only 4 benches that get filled up very fast. Ends up sitting in the playground/ park area - people who don't have kids feel kind of unwelcome there and get looked at by parents. Teenagers or young adults w/o kids can feel like, where do we go? Also feels like people just think we're causing trouble
- Addition of green space - would love to see that parking lot taken out of Newton Center - have more green spaces + residents, even down to the reservoir. There's a strip of land, there's a teeny tiny bench... adding various areas for seats.
- Before Covid, there were always the summer concerts - green area in the middle with the 4 benches and the piano - fills up like 5 seconds in, can't find anywhere to sit.
- Newton Center park: a school or some kind of public building - in those types of spaces, could consider putting an amphitheater type space, a semi-permanent concert venue (x3)
- More parklets! (x2)
- The need for more bike racks
- Transportation from center to center, whether its via public transportation or bike
- The need for more bright, vibrant spaces
- Public art spaces; from members of the community, artists
- Public art: draws people in and creates a welcoming environment
- Example: Doors Project
- The need for more lighting - ex: large parking lot in Newton Center where the benches are. It's a great space to hangout, however it gets very dark
- Small local community center where you could take classes and kids could hang out. Having a councilor there to help with mental health stuff if they can't get it at home. More

green spaces – I think Newton is already pretty great with this but having parks and outdoor spaces that are more sustainable and people can enjoy in the nicer months and indoor for the colder months. Obviously, there's a library but you can't talk or eat in there – so a space that is a bit more open.

- If there was a community center, it would be cool if there were eco classes as well.

Q3: Do any of the village centers already have these things? If so, please provide examples. What do they not have? What's in-between?

- Having a central green + seating near stores is important- Newton Center has this but not many others. few have lighting at night
- The big parking lot in Newton Centre dissuades some from wanting to hang out there
- Needham St- trees are nice but nowhere to sit. nowhere to cross the street. convert parking lot, add general meeting space
- Why can't we have community led shows in village centers? The piano on the green in Newton Center- when people play that, people congregate, and it is a community event
- Have some space where pedestrians are prioritized- in Auburndale and most village centers, everything feels disconnected
- Overall, we need more investment in village centers, and we need to take this change seriously. In the short term we can do easier improvements, but should not lose sight of the harder, larger changes- there is room for both
- Public space is not being activated to its fullest
- Need more outreach done through Instagram
- Make it more clear how young people can get involved
- What can we do now? We want to start changing things now
- Covid has brought to light the outdoor gatherings - not that we only want that - but the outdoor space we have is nice and more if it would be nice too
- My sister is having her dance recital in Lexington because it's the nearest outdoor performing space
- Bike racks - don't want to lock my bike to a tree anymore. There are a few and they're all filled
- Tables and chairs - more places to hang out.
- Newton Centre has some tables and chairs, always filled by people taking meetings there or just hanging out with friends. That's my go to place to meet up. That's the ideal place where you go to meet someone.
- Outdoor seating for restaurants
- Don't feel like we have a cafe with a lot of outdoor seating
- Keeping outdoor seating permanent for restaurants - but takes out 3-4 parking spots - so not sure what the incentives are for those businesses
- Get the sense that there are a lot of empty parking spots, like in the Newton Centre parking lot - always a lot of empty spaces - there is space that we could reserve or take out parking spots and reserve for seating or expanding the park space or the greenery
- Housing above retail - seems like something every village center should just have. There's just so much untapped potential. We'll grow our commercial tax base, and it

would be cool to live in housing above retail. Something a lot of younger people fantasize about to go to do when they leave Newton

- I agree as someone who would definitely do that. Only concerns are sound proofing and making sure (a) housing is affordable and (b) pet friendly
- omg you know what parking lot I have never seen close to full in my life is the Newton Centre CVS (and other businesses) one
- Can the city have any control over capping the rent?
- Definitely yes to more housing above retail
- Yes, it feels like this [housing above retail] could add to vibrancy. That kind of housing is not as appealing if you're outside a parking lot or above a store that isn't engaged much
- Nonantum is not a place I frequent that much - but I would so much rather do that and then drive or bike to the places I do want to go. In general, even if you don't love everything right around you, it is far more convenient than living in a part of Newton that's more expensive.
- Importance of being transit oriented - do not have to live in your favorite part of Newton if it's easier to get to the parts you love
- There's this assumption that apartments above retail would be young people only - but that's not true, around the world bigger families live above businesses - but above us in Austin St, so many families live above the toy store. As a city, we have so many big homes on big lots, assuming that's just what young families want. If you expand the options, a lot more people will move in.
- Older single people in 40s and 50s would definitely move there
- 2-family homes and duplexes are very convenient as well.
- Would love to see more rental options coming into Newton that are obviously in the affordable range
- Accessible apartments - should have them city wide - but my coworker lives in an accessible apartment near Newton Centre and can only afford it because the landlord way under-charges them - that's the only reason they're in Newton. Accessory apartments are a lifeline for folks
- More space for sitting where young people are meant to be at - space between Starbucks and Nero in Newtonville
- Angier is very lit and welcoming
- Austin Street Mural (bright)
- Wider sidewalks and fewer cars parked on streets
- Consider blocking off streets for better walking - example Moody Street in Waltham is closed to parked cars
- Not all village centers need additions; example: adding the green space to Waban that is not being used.
- The bike racks that existed have been taken down for outdoor seating and needs to go back, all villages, parks, sports fields, and schools
- Bus stops not visible enough and added seating would be great
- Decision makers need to understand how big of an impact schools have on village centers: North students visiting and supporting local businesses in Newtonville and South students visiting and supporting local businesses in Newton Centre.

- Having more community centers – having areas for engagement or having parks and stuff like that. In big towns / cities like Newton, there can be less engagement – things can get outsourced to private entities. Having areas that are valued by the community. I used to take classes out of the community center in the town I used to live in. Also teach about important things or the environment – or have classes about major city issues, or have outreach like this.
- This is amazing that you are doing this outreach program – I would have never heard about it, but I did because I'm really politically active.
- I have lived in Newton for 3 years – closest I have found is the school. But I feel like I should talk to my sisters about it because they are 11 and 14, so they're at the age where they would be using those community spaces. I haven't really encountered anything that's stuck out in my mind.
- During Corona, we would hang out at Cabot a lot. A lot of teenagers hang out at Starbucks or a café. Any green area with seats or any indoor area with seats.
- Small businesses in Newtonville get flooded with kids.

Q4: How can the city better engage the younger people of Newton?

- Talking in schools is one of the best ways to do it. I have talked to so many people about getting involved with stuff. Biggest issue isn't lack of enthusiasm, it's just lack of knowledge about how to get involved. It's easy to repost on Instagram versus actively seeking out people.
- Focus groups like these.
- I think a lot of people aren't bothered by trying to make Newton better.

Next Steps

The community findings from these focus groups will be compiled with the other forms of village center engagement and quantitative analyses to establish synthesized community desired outcomes to assist the City Council in determining policy. If you have any questions on this report, please email zoningredesign@newtonma.gov.

Project Summary

The City of Newton Planning & Development Department held a series of 12 focus groups between May and September 2021 as part of the overall engagement and outreach for the [Zoning Redesign: Village Centers project](#). This phase of the ongoing Zoning Redesign project focusing on village centers began by asking Newton community members to share their experiences of and their future visions for their village centers. The input gathered will help the City of Newton identify areas of research for how to update the zoning for village centers.

Eight focus groups were identified to further equitable engagement in an effort to facilitate outreach with groups of the Newton community that have been underrepresented in our past engagement efforts. When possible, these sessions were co-facilitated with the appropriate Newton board or commission, like the Commission on Disability, Youth Commission, Council on Aging, the Human Rights Commission, and the Newton Housing Authority. Four focus groups were identified for the village center economic development communities, which were co-facilitated by the Newton Economic Development Commission and our consultant, Utile.

Introduction

City staff held the Younger People (25-35) focus group on August 3, 2021. In addition, following the focus group, staff reached out to participants who registered but could attend in order to hold phone interviews asking the same questions asked during the focus group. 22 people expressed interest in participating through the Focus Group Interest Form. In total this focus group had:

- 5 focus group participants
- 3 interview participants

These sessions were not recorded in order for participants to feel comfortable and speak freely. What follows below are the “raw” notes compiled by the focus group notetakers and co-facilitators.

Demographics

In Newton, younger people ages 25-35 represented 9.3% of the total population according to the 2019 ACS 5-Year Estimates¹.

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<https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=1600000US2545560&tid=ACST5Y2019.S0101&hidePreview=true> (2020 Census Data is not publicly available yet for these specific age groups.)

Focus Group Notes

Q1: What kinds of values do you want to see present in village center placemaking and development? Placemaking describes both built space (building types for retail or mixed use, housing types, accessible sidewalks, etc.) and how the built space is activated through programming and use (Can the public use it? Is there general meeting space?)

- Public spaces that I can bring a group together for a celebration, could be a public or private space.
- Spaces for temporary events that can be flexible for a variety of options.
- As a Newtonville resident I am so excited that Trio has brought more of a Brookline feel. I love the new restaurants.
- Parking is critical for young families to frequent village centers. I walk to my local village center, but I drive to others and I like to frequent them. I wouldn't go to these other village centers if I can't park.
- More frequent service on the commuter rail is critical!
- If you are trying to live in Newton without a car, you need to be close to a supermarket and not all village centers have a supermarket.
- My wife and I are a one car household and it is getting harder and harder because we don't have access to all basic needs. And then thinking about having children, I can't see getting by without 2 cars unless things change in village centers and beyond.
- I find the things that are missing in Newton's traditional village center that I want are in places like The Street in Chestnut Hill.
- I want to see village centers that offer options at different times of the day (late-night options). Everything closes early.
- Village centers need to be places of diversity...diversity of businesses and populations (age, race), etc.
- Places that attract people and businesses who are not already in Newton, they need to be testing grounds.
- Village centers are places for people and infrastructure for greater walkability and biking should be prioritized. This doesn't mean not allowing cars, but rather doing it in a way that slows them down and keeps parking behind stores.
- Village centers should be places where I can do most, if not all of, my errands.
- Village centers need to be accessible to all. For some people that means bike lanes, and for others that means parking (families with young kids or people with disabilities).
- I would prefer to see more local and independent shops instead of chains (i.e. small coffee shop instead of Starbucks).
- Civic spaces are critical, my family uses the Waban Library a lot.
- Village centers should be places to linger. I want to be able to do some work, have a working meeting, do some errands, etc. For me, this requires more long term parking because I don't live within walking distance to a village center.
- What I love about village centers, as someone who grew up and lives in Newton, is that they are places for chance encounters with people from all different parts of my life.

- Village centers should be places for 24/7, or at least more than current, activity. Current places have odd hours that are not convenient for younger people.

Q2: Based on these values, what do you think Village Centers need in order to be more equitable for young people and to better fit young people's needs?

- When I moved back to Newton I knew that I was giving up walkability. I intentionally lived close to a village center to be as walkable as possible, but it is still limited and even more so in other areas.
- It was not easy for me to find housing that met my needs in Newton. I agree with walkability but I gave some of that up to find a house. I want more houses, smaller houses, in/around village centers
- We need places to walk. We need destinations in our village centers.
- Grocery stores that are co-ops and support the local region.
- We need more dog parks and spaces for pets. Particularly off-leash.
- Places that facilitate more of a nightlife (music venues). Ex. being Club Passim in Harvard Square.
- Active rooftops.
- I wish there were more fitness options.
- Parking is necessary but it should be behind the stores and the shops up against the sidewalk.
- To get the people and things in village centers needed to attract younger people requires more density. This density needs to come in the form of housing, at different price points and types.
- For my young family, I am looking for more playgrounds, parks, and open spaces (ideally shaded).
- I would like to see a greater physical (infrastructure) network connecting the village centers to each other and the region. I would like to bike more, but I don't always feel safe. I take public transit when I can, but need greater interconnectivity.
- Places to gather where I do not need to pay or buy something. One idea should be to repurpose spaces like religious institutions, which are typically empty.
- There needs to be safer places to walk, especially at night. The lighting is terrible in and around village centers.

Q3: Do any of the village centers already have these things? If so, please provide examples. What do they not have? What's in-between?

- Thinking about the Ink Block in the South End. Doesn't have public transportation, but it is trying to be a self contained village center.
- I think Newtonville does a pretty good job. But it is limited and I go outside of Newton for a lot of unique things.
- Places like Bow Market and Aeronaut are amazing and they are large spaces with anchors and then they have smaller stores and places that "attach" themselves to them

- Newton should create “corridors” that create connections not only between village centers, but also between village centers and other points of interest (i.e. industrial space turned into Bow Market like spaces)
- There is only so much space in village centers. So having connectors will alleviate pressure, create more justification for more Blue Bikes
- Moody Street in Waltham is a great example. Outdoor dining needs to be here to stay and in more village centers.
- I live in Oak Hill Park so I don’t really have a village center. I don’t find the village centers currently in Newton provide for what I am looking for and instead I go to Boston, Cambridge, and Somerville because that is where my friends live and the types of businesses I am looking to frequent are.
- Where we used to live, in Jamaica Plain, had a lot of things that Newton’s village centers should have.
- Waban is lucky enough to have all the basics, but I typically go to other village centers to go out to eat or meet with friends.

Q4: How do you think the City of Newton can better engage it’s younger community members (both those who live, work, and attend school in Newton)?

- The City needs to “prove” that they are working for younger people. Invest in things and spaces Newton already has (farmers markets at better times, outdoor dining, etc.).
- I believe this is a really difficult thing to do. Younger people are incredibly busy. For me, I was fortunate enough to find a house to purchase. A lot of my income and time goes to that. Other friends of mine have young kids and don’t have the time to get involved with something like village center zoning. And most importantly, I believe the people with the least amount of time (i.e. younger people) are the ones who support change, but I don’t know how can get them and keep them involved.
- Going to the places where these young families are, like preschools and elementary schools.
- The City should start engaging students in high school so that they get engaged and remain. Also the colleges, since there are so many around Newton.

Q5: For those who have moved back to Newton, what do your friends from home think? Are they back in Newton?

- Most friends are in surrounding towns (Brookline, Waltham, Dorchester, South End).
- I am the only one of my friends who has moved back.
- I only moved back because of the Pandemic and moved in with my family. I would not have come back otherwise.
- My wife grew up in Newton and we moved here because of that. Some of the friends she grew up with have moved back, but definitely not the majority.
- I moved to Newton this year because my partner has other family members that live here.

August 3, 2021
Young People (25-35)

**Zoning Redesign: Village Centers
Focus Group Summary Report**

Next Steps

The community findings from these focus groups will be compiled with the other forms of village center engagement and quantitative analyses to establish synthesized community desired outcomes to assist the City Council in determining policy. If you have any questions on this report, please email zoningredesign@newtonma.gov.

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Introduction

City staff and the Human Rights Commission held the BIPOC (Black, Indigenous & People of Color) focus group on July 27th, 2021. In addition, following the focus group, staff reached out to participants who registered but could attend in order to hold phone interviews asking the same questions asked during the focus group. 24 people expressed interest in participating through the Focus Group Interest form. In total this focus group had:

- 11 focus group participants
- 1 interview participant

These sessions were not recorded in order for participants to feel comfortable and speak freely. What follows below are the “raw” notes compiled by the focus group notetakers and co-facilitators.

Demographics

In Newton, BIPOC community members represent 28.9% of the total population according to the 2020 Census data¹. The distribution of BIPOC community members is as follows:

- Black or African American alone: 3% (2,670 / 88,923)
- American Indian and Alaska native alone: 0.15% (137 / 88,923)
- Asian alone: 16.56% (14,725 / 88,923)
- Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander alone: 0.03% (28 / 88,923)

¹ <https://mtgis-portal.geo.census.gov/arcgis/apps/MapSeries/index.html?appid=2566121a73de463995ed2b2fd7ff6eb7>

- Some other race alone: 2.23% (1,984 / 88,923)
 - Two or more races: 6.92% (6,153 / 88,923)
 - Total BIPOC/non-white population of Newton: 28.90% (25,697 / 88,923)
-

Focus Group Notes

Q 1: What kinds of values do you want to see present in placemaking? Placemaking describes both built space (building types for retail or mixed use, housing types, accessible sidewalks, etc.) and how the built space is activated through programming and use (can the public use it, is there general meeting space)

- Speaker is on the Indigenous Peoples' Day Committee. Planning has not been easy in getting the City to participate. So, with these outdoor events (Albemarle Park) we need to be better at making sure the programming reflects the people we are honoring and the people who are there. Many people are averse to change, but I want to celebrate what we have now and plan for the future.
- Boston, and New England overall, has a deep sense of history. And this history is told from a certain perspective and of specific people. I would like placemaking to look at more of a future view, and not so much looking back. This is especially true as this area becomes more diverse and dynamic.
- I would like to see a blend of the first two bullets. There is a real deficit in the City of representation. Ex. look at who is using the Senior Center either because the programming doesn't speak to the diverse people in Newton and/or just feeling not welcome.
- The best spaces are made the best because of the diversity that they offer and for the diversity of people that they attract.
- As a business owner of color, I would like programs made available to start businesses here. But I could not afford any space in a village center without assistance.
- Walking, biking, accessibility
- More acknowledgment about the land - many cities and towns around the country are doing land acknowledgments - Wampanoag and Massachusetts people, including the Mashpee Wampanoag - little evidence of the historical place here in Newton and that's reflected in schools and the curriculum, children, and grandchildren of Newton Public Schools. History is taught but not the history of the whole community
- Seeing Newton become the hub of development of huge apartment complexes - sold to the community as opportunities for diversity are disingenuous because the price points of all of these apartments are way beyond what most folks can afford. It's offensive to me as a minority-represented individual, that's what I came here for
- Accessibility, I do want to put in there an example of a mom with a stroller or kids on vehicles - building on X's point, thinking about how to get from one place to another and stop being so car-dominant or car-primary because when we talk about community placemaking, people go to buildings or roads - and that misses everything else about how people get to and from places. Would love to see the city be more open, in terms of

how we're thinking about even segregation or talking about the various smaller blocks around placemaking. I know you gave a definition, but can we re-define what makes placemaking? And not be stuck to current understandings but rather push the components on placemaking that allows the conversation to be a lot more open

- Also think about how families / different stakeholders are getting from one place to another, and how do they interact with each other? Other things I miss about Newton and would love for it to be part of placemaking: sounds cliché but community and congregating. I want the ability to congregate with people, especially now with covid (where depending on your tolerance with indoors) - outdoors is the best way to meet with people. Buildings are 4 sides - do buildings have to have 4 sides and is that an assumed part of placemaking? How do we structure spaces too? Because once you define an area as part of a location, you start defining a space - vs how can we be as open with our space? Really with the intention of bringing everyone together in community. how do I meet with someone who doesn't necessarily belong to commerce but rather being with the environment or with Newton? Hard to think of good places to congregate and be more in nature.
- Also, spaces to have spontaneous interaction with people. In retail, you go in and do your business - whereas are there other spaces that invite interaction, either with the land or with each other? Or with our history, as X would say? How do we build those layers and +15 per affordability and I think the vision that I want is, how does Newton... if we were to do an experiment, and I-90 were not built and all of the black community were not moved away, and we did not - redlining did not occur - the housing is not expensive - who would live here, and could that be our goal and what would it take to get there? And once you raise the Indigenous history of course - how do we invite those people here?
- +1 on art

Q 2: Do any of the village centers already represent these values? Share examples of specific parts of village centers that have or do not have these values.

- West Newton does not. Thinking about the historical black community that was decimated following the Mass Pike. Some people know about this, but not everyone. And it is not fully reflected in this space.
- I thought of Newton Centre which is hard to get to because of all the cars that circle around that but in my mind, I thought, wouldn't it be cool if cars had to park farther out, and people could easily engage with people there?
- Living in Newtonville, it's been getting a facelift - right between the Starbucks and Caffè Nero, I ran into someone I knew, I ran into Nevena - we were just hanging out there, there were no cars going through there. It was just us sitting there, and there's a beautiful mural - just felt like you can just, unintentionally run into someone. I was planning to meet someone there and I ran into people I knew. Unfortunately, no view of the history of the land we were on - but almost got there.
- For me, Nonantum is an example that comes to mind in terms of the Italian American heritage of the community there and the public space - which I think is lacking in the other village centers, except for Newton Highlands - yes there's a Starbucks everywhere

but, X was saying there's little opportunity to make it a neutral, non-commercial space. And of course, any space that's community-owned will immediately be developed in Newton.

- I love that space in Newtonville that was talked about - I've had so many beautiful mornings there - agree with X, I would pick Newton Highlands. Feels like local businesses, you can walk into the stores/restaurants and you know for the most part the owners (not much commercial there) - I love the park nearby, within walking distance of public transportation. So, if I have a friend in town, we can meet there - and we can connect. A place that can be gotten to in different ways, I bike there it's really accessible, I love that. It's interesting - when you were talking about Newton Centre - sometimes a lot of the really beautiful and wonderful spaces, especially that involve nature, actually if anything are the least open spaces because the air it gives off is exclusivity and exclusiveness. Something I do *not* want in placemaking in Newton - I think people, I'm probably projecting and thinking through - if there is something nice, people want to protect it and not have more people be part of it because it intrudes with the privacy of their homes - it doesn't feel as open. An example is Crystal Lake - you can't park around the lake because I'm pretty sure the residents complained about it at some point - and so the majority is so inaccessible - which is great cause it encourages you to bike there but there's also no bike rack - you'll have that angry local homeowner who is vehemently against it and wants it to stay in that place. So, I think that's going to be one of the bigger hurdles and it's a bummer.
- Can we use the word 'share' instead of 'lose'? Sharing is a value to add to the first conversation: a place that we can all share - which requires a sense that it's OK if we don't get it all the time
- +1 to Sharing
- So, a question: how do we convince many Newton residents that - for instance, Newton Highlands, I have a son who lives there, great to visit him and grandkids - wonderful town park - how do we convince Newton residents like me who are fearful that within 10 years Newton's going to turn that park into an 8-unit apartment complex? Because it's walking distance to the T, it'll help diversify Newton, and we're going to lose more public space, I think there's big concern with a large # of Newton residents that are not listen to or don't speak enough about it - but the rush to develop Newton is eating up Newton
- Well, housing is a big part of that
- I'm offended by what you're saying: the prices of the new places are well beyond the price points of the people who are living close to the edge. We're not going to diversify - these apartments are going to cost X to Y - look at the income level required to support a development happening right now in Newton, it is not going to diversify Newton
- By diversify, I don't mean culture - there's some truth to it but I mean diversify housing. Give more housing options, supply + demand. When you have more supply, less demand.
- But you're right, if we as a city could build it ourselves without a developer who wants to make money, we would - you can make all housing cheap. And they need to make \$ somehow, it gets complicated very quickly, those price points - they're not cool.

- I walk sometimes to Newtonville, but don't visit others. Newtonville has a lot of empty spaces. Why? It is a waste. Neighborhood has changed so much due to empty storefronts
- I have never been to Waban or Auburndale, because there is no draw there.

Q 3: If we had no barriers - did not need to worry about budgets or the law of physics, etc., everything is on the table - what would be your dream Village Center? What would look different in the village centers we just talked about?

- Housing must be part of any future village center. Historically, there were residential units above commercial spaces in our village centers. Putting housing here would not be as contentious as pushing more housing in the surrounding neighborhoods.
- As a business owner of color, I would like programs made available to start businesses here. But I could not afford any space in a village center without assistance.
- The City needs to hire a DEI (Diversity, Equity & Inclusion) coordinator to help develop strategies and programming to get village centers open and welcoming to everyone.
- We need more diversity of housing generally. Village centers are one place for this, but it should be everywhere. When you have a diverse housing stock, diverse people will follow.
- I have to go to other cities and towns to eat my food, hear my music, etc. etc. etc. I know this won't happen overnight. But maybe we can have more temporary spaces so these things can happen on a regular basis. I love my community and I want to keep my money here.
- The placemaking could be future forward spaces (incubator) that embraces ever changing and evolving businesses. Ideally, they would then be able to find permanent spaces as they succeed.
- A dream would be some of what's already been discussed but - places for families or young families, older families, to go and have a place to sit outside. I would like more of a community center-ish vibe. During good climate, different bands come and play different types of music. Have more diverse events, so that we can all continue to learn from one another. Giving some local artists an opportunity to sell their art at this magical dream park with places to sit, parking or accessible via what's that new thing? NewMo! Give high schoolers an opportunity to sit with the elders or young families with babysitting - volunteer - sometimes we just need a little help or an extra body to do something - and I know Newton Neighbors Helping Neighbors are a great resource, but if we could connect on that level where people go and feel that awesomeness and feel comfortable with each other- I think we could all network and support each other - that would be a dream
- In Italy - it was such a cool way to experience community, sit out on the courtyard, eat gelato, interact with the locals
- I'd like to support what you said: traveling to Europe, all the outdoor venues and restaurants, perhaps one of the only decent things that's come about with the last year is the opportunity for more restaurants to have space outside and it's created a different atmosphere and certainly, that's what you feel when you travel to Europe. I spend a lot of time in France and see that there - creates an opportunity for communities to come

together and so I would hope that these opportunities for these restaurants to set up their jersey barrier and protect them from the traffic would actually lead to less traffic and converting more roads to pedestrians, to restaurants, to the community - you can sneak around Newton Centre by going this backroad - why not take advantage of this unfortunate lesson that we've had to learn? Maybe there's a silver lining with restaurants, stores, that we should think about

- Everything we said we couldn't do, we ended up being able to do
- Another word I'd love to put into placemaking: FOUR SEASONS. Thinking about accessibility and openness, I hate the cold. But what I realized covid made me do is think about 4 seasons, design placemaking in a city that really welcomed all kinds of weather and just enjoy our spaces of 4 seasons - because when I think about where I want to go in the winter, I rarely venture out to Newton - I actually go elsewhere, which is sad to say. And when I think about bumping into people. The weather and seasonality are another dimension to look at openness
- I would endorse what was just said - go out west and any town out west, they're 4 seasons and we tend to shut down. I think that's a missed opportunity
- Only other idea/ word I would add: this idea of liveliness. I want to go to a village center and feel like it is lively. Not only that there's people out there eating - thinking about Barcelona, nine blocks, no cars, everything's pedestrian... but also thinking about not only consuming but like other community art projects - community gardens is something I'd love to see. But most conversations I've had - we have a little garden in our front yard but when we're out there and people are walking, we have those chats with our neighbors - it provides a conversation piece. I love the idea of cross-generation piece - our elderly are shut away somewhere and if there's a way for us to have cross-generational interaction, shared wisdom...
- But if our intent here of this evening has to do with diverse communities: would we think about that, centers need to encourage the presence via art, via restaurants, via public spaces, the diversity of the peoples in our community, because otherwise, they become homogeneous, Starbucks, generic Americana. And if our conversation tonight is about something else, then that needs to be kept in mind. Right now, a lot of our communities are pretty generic - and that's OK - Newton is a wonderful place - but it could reflect more
- If you're taking opinions from Focus Groups but opinions, are the opinions weighted to take into account? From groups that are more marginalized? And from a zoning perspective if the values are, we want small businesses, more local artists? How does the zoning and permitting favor those particular kinds of businesses?
- If the city itself has a value for diversity, we have to make that accessible through all of our systems - zoning, permitting - that's a big one - that speaks to a systemic piece
- We need a real ice-cream store!
- More vibrant. more small businesses- less banks and nail salons.
- Sad about the closure of diner in Newtonville, which was a nice thing to have.
- Parking is difficult- better education about the parking that is available might mean that less parking is needed in the future.
- Why does the bike lane just stop in Newtonville? it's dangerous

- Need better pedestrian crossings
- Why is there street parking? get rid of it for a bike lane.

Q 4: How do you think the City of Newton can better engage it's BIPOC community members (both those who live, work, and have children attending school in Newton)?

- As a person of color, and having only lived here for a few years, I have struggled to feel confident to engage in the process when people who are lifelong residents begin to get loud.
- We need to maintain virtual sessions. As a young parent, I cannot come to City Hall to attend meetings. (x2)
- You need to ask specifically what "x" group is looking for...be specific!
- Take existing holidays/celebrations and use them as jumping off points to engage people at them.
- Places and spaces need to be made for the non-majority. People don't want to engage because they don't feel like there is anything to engage on that they care about.
- I would applaud what you're doing here tonight - I've lived here 23 years, and this is the first such invitation for communication - so showing that Newton is welcome to other voices, a very small population of other voices in Newton but just showing that you're interested in other voices sends a message, so that's great
- In my experience with the city, I know they're listening now - so let's show up - may not have always been the case but using these moments is powerful
- Something I spoke with Nevena about - I think getting the message through in terms of anything that we have going on with the City by connecting with the PTOs, by connecting with FORJ - getting those groups involved so that we can get some responses. Because I think what I'm hearing is that we may not have enough people kind of coming to the table and responding. Putting things into other languages for the constituents, for the people who live here in Newton - that should be the norm, that should be common, shouldn't be an issue. If someone needs to talk to someone at city hall, having someone accessible who speaks Cantonese -
- That's exactly what I was thinking - understanding who the nodes are in the community?
- And since you mentioned METCO - one of the things, this is not to this point - thinking about police presence in public spaces, police presence - people experience it in very different ways and being very sensitive to that
- We need more social workers working with the police
- I would love to stay connected in area's we discussed - how can I help & volunteer?
- Continue to provide opportunities for BIPOC focused feedback, carve out time just for this group

Next Steps

The community findings from these focus groups will be compiled with the other forms of village center engagement and quantitative analyses to establish synthesized community desired

July 27, 2021
BIPOC (Black, Indigenous & People of Color)

**Zoning Redesign: Village Centers
Focus Group Summary Report**

outcomes to assist the City Council in determining policy. If you have any questions on this report, please email zoningredesign@newtonma.gov.

Project Summary

The City of Newton Planning & Development Department held a series of 12 focus groups between May and September 2021 as part of the overall engagement and outreach for the Zoning Redesign: Village Centers project. This phase of the ongoing Zoning Redesign project focusing on village centers began by asking Newton community members to share their experiences of and their future visions for their village centers. The input gathered will help the City of Newton identify areas of research for how to update the zoning for village centers.

Eight focus groups were identified to further equitable engagement in an effort to facilitate outreach with groups of the Newton community that have been underrepresented in our past engagement efforts. When possible, these sessions were co-facilitated with the appropriate Newton board or commission, like the Commission on Disability, Youth Commission, Council on Aging, the Human Rights Commission, and the Newton Housing Authority. Four focus groups were identified for the village center economic development communities, which were co-facilitated by the Newton Economic Development Commission and our consultant, Utile.

Introduction

City staff held the Renters virtual focus group on July 22, 2021 as well as in-person focus groups with Newton Housing Authority (NHA) renters in Mandarin, one group in Newtonville on August 24 and a second group in Newton Centre on August 26 (facilitated by city staff, NHA and Neighbors Helping Neighbors.) In addition, following the focus groups, staff reached out to participants who registered but could not attend in order to hold phone interviews asking the same questions asked during the focus group. 17 people had expressed interest in participating through the Focus Group Interest Form. In total this focus group had:

- 6 focus group participants
- 15 NHA Mandarin-speaking renters participated in in-person tours (observations from these renters have an asterisk* in the notes below)
- 1 interview participant

These sessions were not recorded in order for participants to feel comfortable and speak freely. What follows below are the “raw” notes compiled by the focus group notetakers and co-facilitators.

Demographics

In Newton, Rental units represented 28% of the total housing stock according to the 2019 ACS 5-Year Estimates¹.

1

<https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=&t=Owner%2FRenter%20%28Householder%29%20Characteristi>

- We need more housing in village centers. More dense housing.
- As an older person, I want to be back in village centers in housing above active stores.
- I moved to the area to be close to the Commuter Rail, and what we have now is awful. The movement and flow is terrible. I want there to be a seamless connection between transit and the village center.
- Better transit is an absolute essential. I am a lifelong taker of the express bus into Boston. I have moved since the Pandemic and I have no idea how I am going to get to work.
- Village centers need more green space. In Newtonville this would be great if the Green Space decked over the Pike.
- Because I live in a building, with limited space for storage and other extra needs, and on a fixed income, I want my village center to help fill/provide my needs, and other general community needs that could be met through the public realm:
 - Public open space (yard/green space/plaza)
 - Drop boxes for public services
 - More alternative transportation options (bikes/scooters/etc.)
 - EV charging stations
 - Maker spaces/Art studios
 - Rentable entertainment spaces
 - Clean public bathrooms
 - Places to do things for free or for cheap
 - Affordable homes (ownership/renters)
 - Libraries...at least a reading room/business center
 - Social services and healthcare
 - Keep the outdoor dining
 - Sharing shelves/swap shop
 - Gym equipment
 - Bike/walking routes to connect village centers and the surrounding neighborhoods
 - Performance spaces
- Cars and parking should be kept to the periphery of village centers
- Very worried that we are going to lose West Newton Cinema. It really means something to me and a big sense of my Newton identity.
- I like the way Nonantum is now, but I understand the need for Housing in Newton and across the region is so great. If housing is developed, I want ownership prioritized over rentals.
- Continue to improve on the safety issues, like the recent street improvements in Newtonville have.
- To me, what makes a village center is the mix of local businesses, which I feel new development displaces. If we have new development, maintaining and promoting new local businesses should be required.
- More affordable, diverse grocery stores that carry Asian vegetables and fruit which would increase their likelihood of visiting the village center.*

- Multilingual services/programs for the senior center along with reliable transportation options.*
- affordable, diverse grocery store for easier produce shopping.*
- Scheduled transportation options such as free/low-cost buses that loop around village centers in Newton where tenants could utilize.*
- Enhanced lighting/more street lights for better visibility when walking in the evening. Both on the main road and some smaller side streets along the main road.*
- Increase flashing crosswalk lights (those yellow signs with solar power) to enhance safety due to heavy traffic in the Newton Centre area.*
- Multiple languages for all City flyers/memos/communication.*
- more programming & info in other languages for accessibility of village centers & city programs*
- want more info on the villages - I had no idea Newton had all this culture in Newtonville*
- More walkable concerts & community events that include more cultural diversity*
- grocery/food options that include more cultural diversity*
- Community meals*
- More programming in various languages*
- Reliable shuttles & transportation*
- Permanent public bathrooms especially for older folks & kids*
- Better hours for busses*
- More benches & shade*
- More concerts*
- Free church meals*
- Centrally located community center, with more programming closer to our culture*
- No reliable shuttles exist for NHA renters- would be super nice to have shuttles for Parks & Rec between housing spaces and public spaces*
- Increase # of public restrooms outdoors, for both elders and kids*
- Adding public exercise equipment*

Q3: In our past engagement, we have seen a large disparity between participation from homeowners and from renters. As we consider zoning changes for village centers, how can we make sure renters are heard in the process?

- You need to reach out through landlords and building managers
- I have rented in Newton for more than 20 years and have never participated before. Typically, people in Newton get involved through their children's' school. I do not have kids and I always felt disconnected. I heard about this focus group through my landlord and just the fact that the City reached out directly to renters, like me, is why I am participating now.
- There are many listservs for neighborhoods, religious congregations, other community groups, buy nothing for Facebook groups, street google groups, etc.
- You need to remove the stigma. When I moved to the rental I live in, the neighbors came by and said, "oh you are the new renters". Since then we have become very friendly, but

it didn't start off that way. Also, previous City Councilors who were renters really didn't publicize this.

- I originally got involved because of past developments in village centers, like Austin Street. Since then, I have heard most things from the channels I registered for during that process.
- I like that our opinions are getting directly asked by the Planning Department*
- More educational programs around recycling in multiple languages*

Q4: Is there anything else about village centers that you want the city to consider? (For example, the environment, accessibility, housing, inclusivity, transportation, and more.)

- More publicizing on what we already have (ex. New Arts Center in Newtonville)
- We need more density to support the things we want
- We need to be able to communicate with non-family residents. As a single person who has lived in Newton over 20 years, the City does not really reach out to us.

Next Steps

The community findings from these focus groups will be compiled with the other forms of village center engagement and quantitative analyses to establish synthesized community desired outcomes to assist the City Council in determining policy. If you have any questions on this report, please email zoningredesign@newtonma.gov.

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Introduction

City staff and the Human Rights Commission held the LGBTQ+ focus group on August 2, 2021. In addition, following the focus group, staff reached out to participants who registered but could not attend in order to hold phone interviews asking the same questions asked during the focus group. 16 people expressed interest in participating through the Focus Group Interest Form. In total this focus group had:

- 2 focus group participants
- 5 interview participants

These sessions were not recorded in order for participants to feel comfortable and speak freely. What follows below are the “raw” notes compiled by the focus group notetakers and co-facilitators.

Demographics

The U.S. Census does not ask explicit questions about one’s sexual orientation nor gender identity. Thus, there is no Census data available regarding demographics of Newton’s LGBTQ+ community. However, the 2020 Census data will count same-sex couples living together for the first time in history. This data is not publicly available yet. And when it is, it will provide a partial snapshot of the country’s LGBTQ+ community as many individuals do not live with a same-sex partner. Furthermore, this Census question does not indicate one’s gender identity.

Focus Group Notes

Q 1: What kinds of values do you want to see present in planning for village centers? Both in terms of the built space (building types for retail or mixed use, housing types, accessible sidewalks, etc.) and how the built space is activated through programming and use (can the public use it, is there general meeting space)

- Important that there are wide sidewalks accessible to a wide variety of mobility. Easy for sidewalks to get taken over by outdoor dining - it's great to have outdoor dining but then if someone in a wheelchair can't get through, don't like it. Not sure how that turns into a zoning thing.
- Live in Newton Highlands: like the downtown-y area, I like it. I think it's nice. There's a variety of stores and spaces to go in and around. Newton center, I go into frequently too. Green space there, I like how it is.
- I'm in Newton Centre too, I get dragged to the lake a lot.
- What do people close to the lake think about folks parking there all the time?
- Being Asian and being queer - usually I tend to gravitate towards certain village centers that I view as more open than others. I def get more uncomfortable being in like maybe Nonantum, that kind of area, than like Newtonville - which is right next to Newton North, there are a lot of younger people
- I'll walk there but don't go into any of the businesses there because they don't seem welcoming. I can't pinpoint what it is, but storefronts are very formal looking and everyone's older white people - so a cause and effect- but it's hard to tease apart
- Even if there are older folks who are accepting, it's still intimidating
- Also, it is not very green, so that can contribute to the overall feel. Very cement-y
- Appreciation for the Newton Center doors
- When I walk near the T stop, I get irritated by all the mansions. Why do they live right near the T? Why can't people like me live closer to it so that I can access it? I commute on the Green line, I work in the Fenway area.
- I don't personally know what is being 'ruined' by turning a single-family home into a multi-family home
- I like Newton Centre the most because it seems there's a good diversity of types of restaurants. And there are different types of businesses too - dentists and various businesses. I don't find myself going to Newton Highlands often, if I do it's for O'Hara's
- I love Cold Spring Park - I like the trail, the farmers market being there on Tuesday's is super great, I'd love to see more outdoor events there. Such a nice place, ample parking. Dunno if there are buses there but it's got a lot of streets there anyways, so it is walkable too. Underutilized area.
- Would like to see more musicals and plays to take place in these outdoor areas. There may also be more opportunity for development there? Would be cool if there were more businesses so people could actually go to all of them
- Values: want more openness and it's a very simple thing but you just feel a lil more reassured when you see a storefront with a pride flag, or just making it very much known that Newton has values of respect for LGBTQ+ people. Respecting pronouns. Becoming

more of a thing with zoom because you can display that on your screen - especially in terms of events that the city hosts in particular

- Want more events or spaces kind of like the flag-raising. That's the only kind of specific targeted event that I can think of, that's outside of the school. The schools are a microcosm just because there are a lot of young people and it's generally just more progressive and accepting than the city
- A+ to there being pride flags in the area
- Love the idea of a Pride picnic and age friendly
- Can't think of queer-owned businesses
- School has the GSA - both north and south have 'To be Glad day'
- Vibrant, welcoming village center
- That there's activity – that there's places to gather, outdoors for now
- Things that help us value a sense of community in a village – openness to new folks
- Live in Newton Highlands but halfway between Highlands and Waban – so don't feel connected to Waban but go there more often because of the stores that are there. Good small grocery store, good deli – a Starbucks. In Highlands, it's more so of a place because of the Hyde Center and Village Days – trying to think of her kid's school, halfway between Highlands and Waban – so being able to have activities in the village centers. Felt more connected when I had young kids.
- Walkability & accessibility
- Hangout space because right now, ifn Newton Centre- really no place to go to in terms of commercial establishments to hang out. So how do you attract businesses that encourage hangout space? Whether that's like the benches in Newtonville?
- Greenery – spaces that if you're a family, kids can do something while you're grabbing a loaf of bread
- Places people can sit down and hang out where there could be performances
- Attraction of commercial space that is not valuable to banks – is so antithetical to any community building, nothing to do in a bank, no need to go to many banks. When I think about wanting my kid, teenager, to go to a downtown area to get an ice cream cone or browse a store – those are the things I would love to see, and I don't see it right now very much. So, there's very little sense of community feeling when you go to many of the village centers – either because it's so sterile or who you're attracting in commercial space is not conducive to this hangout culture
- There is a locally-owned café in Brookline – made a clear decision that they would not offer Wi-Fi – so that people hung out with each other, not people to do work on here by themselves. We need to respect that businesses need to make money – whether that's a community center, or even a library auxiliary space, where you have tables and maybe some best-sellers in each village – where people can hang out and take out some books but have to be realistic about revenue-based models of businesses and rents that are crazy.
- Exclusivity – grew up in Newton, moved away for college and then back for their first job – having the Green line accessibility has been much better. I like the suburban feel. I know there's been a push for multi-family , and I'm not opposed to that, but I personally like the suburban-esque feel. I like having houses with yards. And I prefer living in a place like that versus a place like Brookline with taller apartment complexes and much less per-person allocated.

- Accessibility – both from a public transit perspective and private transportation. Personally, I don't think there's a way to resolve the traffic problem. So appreciate initiatives taken with bike paths.
- Would love to see a bus structure that actually works and is accessible.
- Community – mean that in all various ways. Like the larger community, a diverse community, an artistic community.
- Fun & playfulness
- Intergenerational access to the space
- Arts & creativity
- Green space
- Accessibility for people who are disabled, temporarily disabled, elderly and more.
- It's done to scale – I hate to see what's been happening with all of these big developments that have been happening, whether on the corner of Walnut or Washington – Newtonville area – and what's happened on Christian and Oak, or that area. Do not want to live in an urban area, do not want crowds. If I wanted to live in Boston, I'd live in Boston. Wanted to live in Newton because way back when, was one of the loveliest cities to live in. A mix with a suburban feel. I like the trees, I like the quiet, I like the less traffic. So with new developments, that can change things – and I want things to change in that way [of the suburban feel] and in that direction.
- Looking at the Oak St plan – just because you have 5 square feet or 10 square feet of some bushes and a couple trees, it does not make it a green space.
- Promoting opportunities for community, where families can see one another. Some place other than our backyards and people can mix – you can stop by and, even someone like me who's older, my children are grown, but I can still go and enjoy it and be in my community.

Q 2: Do any of the village centers already represent these values? Share examples of specific parts of village centers that have or do not have these values.

- John Rice at the Hyde Center – he was always very friendly and welcoming.
- Lately been going to the Newton Highlands Neighborhood Area Council – feels less welcoming and didn't want to go to the meetings. If it could be improved somehow.
- There's a Google Group for Newton Highlands that sometimes is good, other times gets into arguments over things.
- Having coffee shops where you could sit down – in Highlands, one where you can't sit down and the other one is on the corner of Walnut & Lincoln, 3 tables max, not somewhere where you could go easily and hang out.
- Visibility – there's a church in Newton Highlands that has the rainbow symbol and periodically has welcoming sayings / messages. That's right in the middle of the Highlands – so visibility like that helps.
- I don't think any of them have it down – the worst of them is Newton Centre where, except for the green space in the center there – but there is really no soul of Newton in that place except maybe J.P. Licks.
- Newtonville I like very much because there's a small time feel, a grocery store, some eateries that are easy to grab from, a bakery. But even so – if you think about windowed browsing or, 'hey, did you see that shirt or that photograph?' there's none of that in Newtonville either. But there is an element of getting ice cream and being able to eat it outside.

- Newton Highlands – the area is very conducive to having some interesting retail and community space – but nothing there. Like hair salons, banks. Several empty storefronts. Seemed to me when we first moved here – how cute – a space where you could imagine meeting a friend and having a cup of coffee – but there’s, maybe because of the rents being so crazy, it hasn’t risen to the occasion. In terms of cuteness and accessibility, Highlands has the best.
- Newton Centre is pretty good at hitting all of these. You’ve got the T-stop right there, there’s a very nice conglomeration of roads, bike paths are not great but not terrible.
- Newton Centre – it’s lay out kind of lends itself more to some of these activities. The festivals – I feel like a lot of festivals have landed there, because of the big open spaces. Would be nice to see those festivals moved around to different parts of Newton because I think it could work in different places. Or even additional or different ones. Maybe empower the community to help develop some of these festivals. I think a newer one is the music hosting in different places – that’s a cool idea where, I’m sure if there were more ideas and the community was engaged, there would be more reasons to gather. Doesn’t even need to be a budget-intensive thing. But I think I’ve seen dog owner gatherings or a dog parade, where people have a reason to come together with a common interest.
- Have a city-sponsored gay-and-lesbian parents picnic.
- There’s a quaintness to Newton Highlands – the Hyde Center has had some great events that I wish were in some other areas as well. They’ve had some movie nights, and some various activities – I think they were going to have the Juneteenth weekend, that sounded so cool but I couldn’t make it.
- When West Newton had a farmers market, it was great to have it there - and I know the community really enjoyed it – and I know it got moved for Covid – but have a feeling it’s never coming back. Like I was saying earlier, I think there could be more of them throughout Newton or they could be expanded upon.
- Waban area does have curb cuts, does have pedestrian demarcated spaces. So from accessibility and then closer to where I live, the Newton Highland area. It is nice with the Hyde Park center there that there is the green space there, where to have the little ones playing baseball, T-ball. Where people can gather and sometimes set up ice skating in the winter.
- When we first moved here, there had been a series of outdoor concerts in the summer and it was wonderful – they were by village – and we just took our blankets and sat down, and had little snacks for the kids and listened to live music.

Q 3: If we had no barriers - did not need to worry about budgets or the law of physics, etc., everything is on the table - what would be your dream Village Center? What would look different in the village centers we just talked about?

- Pet stores, queers love pets -
- Would like a fenced-in dog park
- Everyone loves ice cream, but we already have JP Licks
- Green areas to sit down with your friends, places to hang out for a while, as well as places in the shade, outdoor seating that’s ideally not attached to a restaurant where you can chill and don’t have to purchase
- Along the line of pets but PLANTS.

- Picnic areas
- Nice to be able to both buy plants but also have a ton of plants along the sidewalk
- Agree with performance areas and an outdoor stage
- Where I used to live had a bandstand where there was both scheduled and unscheduled stuff - def not a queer specific thing but whatever
- Also, for younger LGBTQ+: love the farmers market and def see a lot of queer couples at the farmers' market
- More programs directly in the village – Hyde Center is great but it's a little way out.
- When I've done these vision kits, we've met at Rodney Bakery – that would be a nice place to have regular music or ... the store there keeps on changing hands. For the longest time it was called Ice Cream Works – since then it has gone through a different ownership.
- More places to hang out in the village. Another little garden at the corner of Lincoln & Walnut – but nowhere really to sit.
- Times when the streets were closed off – for that to happen more often than just the Village Day. Block party type. Able to direct traffic so people were less concerned about cutting through the local neighborhood if Lincoln St got closed down.
- More things for all ages. Village Day is geared towards kids and families with kids. Been a while since we had a little carnival type as part of it. So not sure how to have events geared towards different ages – more spaces for young adults and older adults.
- Place in Newton Centre which kind of functions like that – on the corner of Union & Langley. They have had open mics every week. All winter long. So, more things like this – have different themes, have an LGBTQ+ night, have a recent immigrant night, have an Asian American night.
- Different events in that field – there's a Taiwanese Cultural Center right there, they have a festival every summer. This summer, Juneteenth was celebrated there. The ability to have more festivals there –
- While there was the pride flag raising – maybe there's something more specifically for LGBTQ+ folks
- Just having different prices – rather than it being so expensive to live here. Living closer to a Village Center, theoretically smaller units and not needing a car, could make it less expensive to live here. Could make it more friendly and welcoming for a lot of people.
- Would love to have a community center in each village that was open, available for meetings, that you could have with your local club, or work on the internet, or study, or do your work. Would be an amazing welcoming place, saying – we're all welcome here – library puts in 30 books a week, on a rotating basis – that would be ideal to be able to have that kind of open space.
- Allowing local businesses to open, to have space that is only dedicated to locally owned businesses. No chains, no banks. Only a certain % of space that would be available for retail or restaurant establishments that were locally owned had a lure of street traffic. A record shop that doesn't exist anymore or a funky gift shop, or a cool coffee shop that has pizzas on Thursday. If you go to Harvard SQ now, so little locally owned.
- I would love to say, 20- 30% of our stores are required to be local businesses. There used to be a junky shop – they had bins of stuff, some of it was junk and some was fun to get into. When I was a kid, you could go into a store and get 10 erasers in the shape

of a car, and it was fun – especially for a kid, especially for adolescents who have \$10 in their pocket, spend it and be independent. That's important.

- And then I would also say – I would love to be able to go out for dinner and go for a movie – no venues in Newton to say let's go see a show! Or let's go dancing – so would love to see more of that
- I'm 50, almost 55 – so my days of going out clubbing are long past me. But I do think that if someone said, hey, where should we meet? I'd like to say, hey, there are 3 places in Newton! Oh, and hey, then we can go here for dessert. And then we can walk around and see the street musicians. The idea of wanting to stay here and not feel like you're in the burbs where everything's a bank and nothing is open past 6pm.
- The visual element of the parking lot in Newton Centre is so unappealing, so uninviting.
- Probably Newton Centre as it is now. Maybe with a little more housing, which runs kind of counter to my earlier point.
- Want a lot of space and want it to be cheap, and those two are not possible to achieve at the same time. But if there were actually truly no limitations, that would be great.
- There would be farmers markets all the time.
- Festivals, like street festivals, with the merchants heavily involved and people are coming in and out of the stores, and there are tables set outside. They shut the streets down so we could walk around.
- [There would be] a lot of places to eat outside, particularly now.
- A strong feeling of community and support and friendliness. Welcoming. Some gay pride flags would be lovely and a feeling of welcome.
- There's music, definitely music. Have loved the art installations that the city is doing – seeing some of that when I'm walking around.
- Would love to see the community policing look less daunting, but that's another thing altogether. I like that they're getting a dog, a good first step, but a police presence that doesn't feel scary. Like maybe no guns at a festival – where my kids don't feel intimidated, where there's more interaction between the firefighters and police department and city employees.
- More opportunities where we can support our local businesses. Like more event-driven, or dine-out for something, where we're supporting the Newton businesses – there's a dire need to support our locals.
- More open spaces. More green – I'm really dreaming here because it doesn't currently exist.
- I live in West Newton and that little area right next to the police department, it could be a more welcoming space for people to hang out at. Kind of feels like the police department's – doesn't feel like it's for the community. And I think it could be better landscaped to support community.
- Fun lights during the holidays – even just some string lights to add a little pizzazz. Like I love the Halloween decorations in the windows – but there's probably other opportunities to do that.
- I lived in Chicago for a long time, and they have such a huge farmers market culture there – and it's like, every neighborhood has a little farmers market. There's enough to go around. You can certainly find farmers – or at least, I could in Chicago – all these booths packed into these little parking lots. And they'd always have a band playing,

some local out there jamming – and I miss that. I miss that sense of community and something to do. Like some of the bigger farmers markets, we would go there and spend the day. Go and get some fresh berries, food vendors who made crepes and other food trucks – literally throw a frisbee, hang out, listen to music, run around with your kids. Really cool and special – and I long for that.

- Ample opportunity for all kinds of outdoor winter events – ice skating rink, there's that one little area off of Watertown St that puts up some holiday lights but in this random little tiny park, and police department throws up their lights every year. Something that could be expanded upon – like hot cocoa, and local schools that perform holiday music. I think there's that sort of thing that could happen that would bring the community out in the winter. And more autumnal themes.
- Rents would continue to be affordable for small businesses. That they not be taken over by yet another Starbucks. It's nice to walk into a store that's unique. There's many of them I will never walk into because I don't want the products they're selling so, what I don't like someone else may. I'd like Newton to keep some of those qualities.
- Would like rents to be affordable for people who are not doctors or lawyers. And I don't know how we do that. I don't know how we do that without creating these monstrosities of just big units in a building – but yet, what bothers me, is that some of these are going up but it's always – oh, it's a proportion, it's 20% [of affordable units] - I've never seen anything more than 20%. Well GEE, we added another 20 people – but in the scheme of things, not sure if it's worth it because we didn't green space. I had to move my mother from Ohio, and she was on her fixed income, and gee, prices in Ohio or not what they're like here. I needed to have her nearby but she wanted her own place, yet I have to take care of her – finding her a place was hell. And I did finally find a place, a 2-family home, and I just lucked out. Just completely lucked out. It was an elderly couple that had not been keeping up with the times of how much they could charge, were well into their 80s. So I think about you know, I've had friends with elderly parents too where it's a challenge. Or the flip side – it's so lovely if you're children want to when they have an opportunity to live nearby. And that's really unlikely to happen [in Newton].
- Can we keep Newton where it still has a community feel and have it be affordable for some of the folks I mentioned – small businesses and just general population be able to be here?
- Was reading something where they were listing a lot of new 1-unit affordable. But that's not helpful. I want artists to be able to be here but a 1-bedroom, what's behind that? Want to see more affordable units for families. Like in other areas, there are teachers who literally live out of their cars because they can't afford anything within a 20-mile radius.
- We're enriched when we can have as much diversity as we can in our community. I want artists, I want musicians, and I want families who have three or four kids.

Q 4: How do you think the City of Newton can better engage its LGBTQ+ community members (both those who live, work, and have children attending school in Newton)?

- If there were more multi-family houses, townhouses, etc. that would be much more doable and you could get a lot more younger people, people who work in the town.

- Cool that focus groups like these are being done. Especially targeted towards queer communities, it's a really big blind spot even though queer people are in MA and in Newton because it's more accepting than other parts of the country
- Library has a great queer space and hosts a lot of great events - partnering with the library could be a worthwhile pursuit. Friends of mine who are queer already engage with the library
- There are all of these events for families with kids – there could be different themes along those lines
- Even just knowing that those things are going on, even if I'm not quite in the senior center – they're all older than me
- These kinds of events make it feel like there's more of a community
- Knows Holly Ryan was an LGBTQ+ liaison –
- I know that the Mayor every year does this flag raising thing – which is kind of cute – but I see that as being very superficial and not systematic in terms of, what does this mean in terms of the city being a welcoming place?
- Through my kid's school there's been nothing but support, no eyes rolled, or questioning looks for anything – my kid's gender fluid, I'm a divorced lesbian – no one blinks an eye
- But when I think about the town center – I rarely see rainbow flags. If you go downtown for pride month, everyone and their mother has the flag up. That's superficial also because it's just a flag – but when Mida opened up in Newtonville, they had a huge pride flag up in their window – and I noticed it and my kid did too. It makes a difference when you see that in a new business establishment – and wouldn't it be great if we had something not only for Pride month but also, "here are 3 queer owned businesses who would love your business"! Or we'd love to give special appreciation to our gay employees at 'X' workplace." We want to make sure that these spaces are available and open for LGBTQ+ groups to meet – there are many kids groups, including some of the MetroWest pride groups for kids – I don't know where they're meeting right now but I know they're not meeting in Newton.
- I don't see much LGBTQ+ in Newton at all. We're not a place where queer folks are more visible – but I would love to see some look and feel for that through our businesses, through the mayor saying – we're going to give a gay pride flag to all businesses and hang them up, just like we do 'happy Christmas' – and, what would it be like if we had that 20% locally owned requirement, what would it be like to say, we want all new businesses in Newton – esp. 5% queer owned – that would be an intentional approach to say, hey, we welcome queer people not only to our schools. Mentioned as a safe and wonderful place for queer kids in the city – not only in our schools but also in our commercial centers.
- And I just don't see it. Again, it doesn't seem to bother anyone.
- There was a Newton Queer Parents yahoo group years ago – I joined it, but they were petering out. But there is no such group now. There is no Newton queer group at all. And I'm not saying it's the city's responsibility to do it. But it's an absence – we have no queer parent or adult organization in the city. And I think that's really absence.
- I wonder if you could start with the schools – queer teachers – even if including them in your efforts, because they're city employees too –

- People who want to celebrate themselves and enjoy their queerness don't seek it out in Newton. If we had more overt clarity that the villages are welcoming – or if we had a queer village – it would do a lot to say, oh, I don't have to go to Roslindale or JP – I can actually see queer community here in Newton.
- Having these focus groups in the first place was a really good way of doing it – I would not partake in a normal meeting, I'm too busy. But having something that requires less commitment than physically going somewhere is impactful.
- A friend pushed me to do this
- Big problem – question of time commitment? People who tend to have their voices heard are those with a lot of time on their hands. So making it easier to do this is a better way to engage this.
- If you send out surveys, I'm sure there are people who could sign up for that – especially questions that take less than a minute.
- Live in Auburndale – make a run down to Waban and back up Comm Ave – when I see posters on the side of the street, that's how I learn the most about what's happening in the city.
- Representation is #1. I'd like to see more representation at different levels of government – but that's beyond our control.
- It's so silly but I think flags really help make people feel welcome – sends a strong signal that this is a community that supports all of its residents and employees and students.
- Like an event or something, a city-sponsored picnic that caters to that community just for gathering purposes and anything like that is great.
- I don't suppose there's any like, Facebook group?
- Some sort of forum that enables people to interact and engage with one another. Because for instance, my wife and I were the only gay moms at our kid's school – and I think it would be nice to be able to find a way to connect with other LGBTQ+ parents. I know we're not the only ones in Newton but we were at the school at that time.
- Stronger ways to connect with one another. But also – events, speakers even, like a speaker talking on a subject that might resonate with that particular population might be interesting – or even, gay courses – different opportunities to engage the community. But it would be cool to see that coming from the City of Newton. It would definitely send a message that may not be well received.
- I used to work at Newton Community Farm a few years back and I feel like that's a highly underutilized place. There's the relationship between the city – I think the city owns the land that the farm is on? – but I think that so many more things could happen there, it's underutilized but also under resourced in terms of staffing. The farm itself doesn't have resources to plan stuff on behalf of the city, but if people in the city could come in and throw an event at the farm – I know the farm would love that, they love when the community engages – have a lot of education programming, trying to teach about the environment and all that good stuff. Could be a much stronger relationship. And there may be other things like that – throughout the city – that there just aren't stronger connections between them. Like how cool would it be to have a farmers market at the farm?
- Rents would continue to be affordable for small businesses. That they not be taken over by yet another Starbucks. It's nice to walk into a store that's unique. There's many of them I will never walk into because I don't want the products they're selling so, what I don't like someone else may. I'd like Newton to keep some of those qualities.

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Eight focus groups were identified to further equitable engagement in an effort to facilitate outreach with groups of the Newton community that have been underrepresented in our past engagement efforts. When possible, these sessions were co-facilitated with the appropriate Newton board or commission, like the Commission on Disability, Youth Commission, Council on Aging, the Human Rights Commission, and the Newton Housing Authority. Four focus groups were identified for the village center economic development communities, which were co-facilitated by the Newton Economic Development Commission and our consultant, Utile.

Introduction

City staff and the Newton Commission on Disability held the focus group for people with disabilities on August 23, 2021. In addition, following the focus group, staff reached out to participants who registered but could not attend in order to hold phone interviews asking the same questions asked during the focus group. 11 people had expressed interest in participating through the Focus Group Interest Form. In total this focus group had:

- 12 focus group participants
- 2 interview participants

These sessions were not recorded in order for participants to feel comfortable and speak freely. What follows below are the “raw” notes compiled by the focus group notetakers and co-facilitators.

Demographics

In Newton, people with disabilities represent approximately 23.1% of the total population according to the 2019 ACS 5-year estimate.¹The distribution of people with these disabilities is as follows:

- 3.2% with a hearing difficulty
- 1.8% with a vision difficulty
- 5% with a cognitive difficulty

1

<https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?t=Disability&q=1600000US2545560&tid=ACSST5Y2019.S1810&hidePreview=true> (2020 Census Data not yet available for this dataset.)

- 5.8% with an ambulatory difficulty
- 2.4% with a self care difficulty
- 5.3% with an independent living difficulty

Focus Group Notes

Q1: Do you feel connected to Newton's Village centers? If so, how?

- Yes, I feel very connected to five of Newton's villages: West Newton, Auburndale, Newtonville, Newton Upper Falls, and Newton Lower Falls
- I visit all of the village centers. For ones nearby I use my wheelchair, for ones further afield I use my van.
- I feel connected to Newtonville and Newton Corner because I go there a lot
- I live in West Newton and go to West Newton village for the post office, CVS, and the West Newton Cinema. I used to go to the bank there. I work in Auburndale. I used to go to school and get my hair cut in Newtonville, and I still go to Newtonville to eat at Cabot's. My sports programs take place in Newton Upper Falls and Newton Lower Falls.
- I go to village centers to go to the bank, grocery store, and post office.
- I enjoy the outdoor space in Newtonville on Austin Street - it's a good place to gather with friends and relax. I hope they put in more trees.

Q2: If there were no limitations or barriers to think about: what would make your most ideal Village Center? What would exist there, what would it look like?

- My ideal village would have a number of crosswalks, traffic lights with crossing instructions that you can hear and enough time to cross the street, curb cuts for wheelchairs and strollers, benches near the bus stops, a bank, a pharmacy, a restaurant or pizza place, and a post office. Also, store owners would be very good about shoveling their sidewalks in winter.
- Sidewalks are a huge problem- some are in terrible condition, and impassible in the snow
- The needs of wheelchair users have been ignored in the past, and should be listened to in zoning redesign
- There should be an option for affordable housing that can facilitate physical therapy and provide access to needed services for people with disabilities
- Village centers should provide better access to healthcare
- Big projects, like the construction on Needham Street, are going to cause even more traffic
- There needs to be more accessible parking, more safe crossings, and less dangerous traffic.

- “I am always looking for curb cuts- without a curb cut, I cannot access anything” - crosswalks and curb cuts are crucial to provide equitable access
- I would love to see a village center where I don't have to go up a step- steps can be an everyday challenge
- Many old buildings, including shops in village centers, only have stairs to get in, so I am excluded and unable to go in them
- We need more accessible parking stalls
- Be more strict in requiring store owners to clear more than just a shovel worth of snow in front of their buildings- especially near sidewalks. Often there is not enough room for me and my guide dog.
- Businesses are usually ok about snow removal, but residential areas on the periphery of the village center are not. I am often forced to drive my wheelchair on the road because the sidewalks are not clear, which is dangerous, or give up independence by having someone else bring my kids to and from school when it snows.
- Curb cut maintenance needs to be better. In winter the road actually drops down lower sometimes, so there is a big difference in height that can be dangerous and challenging in my wheelchair.
- The city should be more proactive about maintaining streets in winter- more plowing and sanding is helpful not just for the disabled, but for everyone to be able to walk on the sidewalk safely. People get hurt every winter and it doesn't have to be like that.
- The city should provide better information for homeowners etc about how important clear sidewalks are
- There should be designated parking for recumbent bikes and e-scooters
- Affordable housing should be accessible to someone on a low SSDI income. The city has made contracts with developers where units are set aside for lower AMIS, but the reality for many on SSDI is that even that amount is too expensive. Village centers are ideal for low income people and those with mobility impairments, so they don't need a car and can use public transport.
- I would like more affordable homeownership opportunities
- The standards for household numbers for affordable units can be limiting- if you need an in-home care person, can you count them? “Nontraditional” family types are often excluded from affordable housing opportunities
- I have respiratory issues- areas near main roadways make it hard to breathe. There should be more awareness about the impact cars have on health.
- At a certain point it comes down to basic human decency- if you are lucky enough to have a house, just shovel your sidewalk!
- People often block bike lanes, which is dangerous- we should better enforce people who idle and block the lane
- All stores should be at least ADA compliant

Q3: As we consider zoning changes for village centers, how can we make sure people with disabilities are heard in the process? What can we do better to facilitate participation for people with disabilities in this process?

- Can we ensure that remote meetings can continue?
- The changes made to public meetings during COVID have enabled many to participate in more meetings- we should continue to allow that.
- NewMo should be accessible to all ages
- NewMo does not help me when it comes to evening meetings- it ends at 5. It should be expanded.
- Advertise NewMo better- people don't know about it
- Lyft has transformed my life- it helps me get around in a way I never could before, because public transportation is not always reliable and doesn't go everywhere I need it to.

Q4: Is there anything else about village centers that you want the city to consider? (For example, the environment, accessibility, housing, inclusivity, transportation, and more.)

- The Hartford Street opening is too wide- drivers do u-turns that cut over where pedestrians and wheelchair users are and it is dangerous
- Every element of the zoning ordinance should have something addressing accessibility
- Everyone who makes policy for the city should try to navigate the city for a day in a wheelchair and see how hard it is with the way things are now
- The city should immediately stop using or remove signs that say "handicap parking" wherever they find them in the city- it is offensive
- Disability is a broad spectrum, and we need to change people's mindset, not just the physical environment. Group homes proposed near village centers met a lot of resistance from the community. education around universal access, and inclusion across a broad spectrum in the community, is crucial
- We should focus on universal disability- someone who is pregnant or has a broken leg often has the same limitations I do. During the epidemic, it's been clear that all of us can be limited for a short time or a long time at any moment.

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Project Summary

The City of Newton Planning & Development Department held a series of 12 focus groups between May and September 2021 as part of the overall engagement and outreach for the [Zoning Redesign: Village Centers project](#). This phase of the ongoing Zoning Redesign project focusing on village centers began by asking Newton community members to share their experiences of and their future visions for their village centers. The input gathered will help the City of Newton identify areas of research for how to update the zoning for village centers.

Eight focus groups were identified to further equitable engagement in an effort to facilitate outreach with groups of the Newton community that have been underrepresented in our past engagement efforts. When possible, these sessions were co-facilitated with the appropriate Newton board or commission, like the Commission on Disability, Youth Commission, Council on Aging, the Human Rights Commission, and the Newton Housing Authority. Four focus groups were identified for the village center economic development communities, which were co-facilitated by the Newton Economic Development Commission and our consultant, Utile.

Introduction

City staff and the Newton Council on Aging held the Older Adults focus group on September 9, 2021. 70 people expressed interest in participating through the Focus Group Interest Form. In total this focus group had:

- 52 focus group participants

These sessions were not recorded in order for participants to feel comfortable and speak freely. What follows below are the “raw” notes compiled by the focus group notetakers and co-facilitators.

Demographics

In Newton, Older Adults aged 65 and above represent 18% of the total population according to the 2019 ACS 5-year estimate.¹

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<https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=1600000US2545560&tid=ACST5Y2019.S0101&hidePreview=true> (2020 Census Data not yet available for this dataset.)

Focus Group Notes

Q1: What values do you want to see present in the planning of Newton's village centers?

- They should be places to meet, gather, and do things together.
- Focus more on sustainability and green space.
- I value historic preservation- centers that still have anchors that feel like true villages are the ones that attract me.
- West Newton and Newton Highlands and Waban have historic buildings that have evolved over time but still have character. Newton Corner doesn't feel like a village center at all. A mix of old and new should be valued.
- Newton Center used to have a wide variety of stores and I went often to do all kinds of activities. Now it is just banks. Why does any village need so many banks and nail salons? There is nothing to do, it isn't family friendly. That has changed during the pandemic because people use the picnic tables in the parking lot, but it is still not lively or family friendly for the most part.
- I value family-friendly and cultural attractions. Newton Center is focused around a parking lot, which is embarrassing. Some plan must be made to use that space for cultural activities.
- Newton lacks culture. We need something vibrant and alive.
- Auburndale Center isn't as nice as Newton Center. We should value inclusivity- Auburndale would benefit from more people there. There are empty parking lots that could be housing. Many buildings here are not historically worth preserving, so they could be different housing to allow for more people. It would make the place more interesting and help local stores. Being more dense would help support car-free transportation as well.
- I do not want to see the villages turn into areas of great congestion, which I think will happen if we put a lot of multi-family houses there. I think the character of the city is changing sadly enough with current developments. For example, the new library mirrored city hall and fit the architecture and the fit of the city. But some of the condos, particularly down in Newtonville, it's like downtown Boston. And I don't want to head in that direction.
- In order for Newton to remain a viable city, it needs an availability of housing options. I live in West Newton village center and see that place in dire need of help. I think having more housing there will actually be very helpful.
- I'd like to see the city centers be more walkable, with more traffic calming. Have had many bad encounters with drivers in intersections in West Newton, just going through stop signs & red lights. Would like to see village centers that are more like Newton Center, more walkable, more life, and attracting people. I think part of that is making more housing available- don't think we need to become Boston, but don't see any harm in having more density in village centers.
- It's unfortunate that 20% of the houses are selling for over 2 million dollars. If we want any younger families moving here, we need more options. Like a variety of 2-3 unit buildings. I see that as vital to village centers.

- Accessibility is extremely important on all different scales - to be very available, walkable. Not like our current commuter rail station, like in Newtonville.
- I also think having stores that are vibrant, functioning - not having empty storefronts- is really important. I think it's a real challenge - because of pressures - two terrific restaurants in Newtonville closed because of COVID. So having a variety of stores that can meet individuals' needs, having them be walkable
- I live along the Washington St corridor - feeling is that Newtonville, West Newton, believe me, we will have and get our share of new housing. But I want more equity across the city in terms of villages embracing housing. Everyone can share in this and shouldn't all be put in Newtonville or West Newton. Will we have some new housing? Absolutely, but I want equity across the city.
- Accessibility is an issue - have spoken alot with Jini Fairley and she points out it's really hard to get fully accessible housing without getting buildings that are big enough to have an elevator. But if we build multi-families where each flat is one floor instead of townhouses, maybe that could work.
- How do we get these vibrant combinations of stores back into village centers in an era when take out and delivery and online shopping has been reinforced because of the pandemic? We can't zone for 'locally owned businesses' only - but maybe zoning can help in some way to encourage that.
- A lot of people who were worried about businesses creeping out are now worried about losing the businesses.
- The few one-story houses that exist in Newton are getting torn down and replaced with giant houses. So that's a concern. And walkability is an important one from that point of view - we're trying to think ahead for when we can't walk that far and can't do those stairs.
- I don't mind higher rise apartment buildings - I wish more of them were condos. I don't understand why they're just building rental housing.
- I would like different kinds of stores in different villages - so that every village has a drug store and a grocery store.
- Want housing increases extended to all of the village centers. West Newton is a big concern for me as well.
- Size of the buildings. Against having 5 and 8 and 10 story buildings in our village centers. It seems that every developer who comes around says he has to have a 5 story building because he can't afford to do it if he doesn't have it.
- Question of diversity is one that gets talked about - there are obstacles to diversity that never get discussed, and one is that I don't know who the buildings are for - I think we've had a program in Newton that has worked very well over the years, building apartments for people at the lower income scale, and I very much support that.
- Newton is an example of what happens when you have for profit developers coming in, they're interested in making money, they're not interested in providing housing or helping poor people or diversity or anything else. I look at the building on Washington Street, it reminds me of Fall River. I think that the building looks like an old industrial building or mill building. I see that the siding is all synthetic, and I wonder how long of a life that has. I probably will be here to look at it. But even so, it's a concern - and I look at the roof of a

parking lot. They used to hide those things and make sure it looks nice. Whereas today's developers, I don't think they care about how things look.

- I want more affordable places to rent for small / locally owned businesses.
- Also concerned about the health issues that arise in Newtonville -there is an infestation of rats. I saw one run up my driveway a few weeks ago - and that's from all of the construction going on.
- Thoughts about diversity and vibrancy are good thoughts and desirable objectives - but I think the path we're taking defeats the good intention.
- Diversity of businesses - I would like to see fewer banks filling the empty storefronts. Could use people-friendly rather than money-friendly institutions in some of those spaces.
- Lovely historic aspects to the Newton villages surrounding them - although I'm in favor of development, I'm also very much appreciative and want to make sure the historic neighborhoods get preserved. I don't have a problem with converting a historic building into a 2-3 condo building. But I want to preserve architecture.
- Idea of small businesses - the landlord wants a bank because they'll be able to pay the rent. If they do that, the landlord should put aside money for smaller businesses who are less likely to develop. Sort of like what they did with the inclusionary zoning ordinance. Maybe on the commercial side, they could come up with some sort of plan like this?
- If you add multi-family homes, people will not be able to walk around. So we have to be cautious about overdoing some of this.
- Green space & greenery - we're thrilled in Newtonville to have some new trees right along Walnut St. But the problem with heat islands - in Newton Corner in particular - is pretty significant. So we need to value green space so that we don't end up developing every space we have.
- Newton Corner doesn't have an adequate village center. There is little that ties the two sides together. Doesn't feel cohesive like other village centers.
- Would like to see the integrity of house lots/living areas for people maintained. Alarmed by the number of build-out projects that are adding on to nice old homes and pushing to the limit. Maintain integrity for both full demos and additions.
- Lower Falls is not really a commercial center. Think of Hamilton field as a village center. Think about village centers as more than a commercial center.
- Concerned about how Riverside development will affect the Lower Falls community.
- Communal gathering spaces are important.
- Auburndale has a volunteer-run community library. Auburndale has an underutilized municipal parking lot that could be a place for multifamily housing.
- For older people, being within walking distance of shopping is a great idea.
- There's an ugly fence walling off Auburndale from mass pike.
- Auburn Street, main center for shops, and some shops have ramps and some have stairs. Ramp entrances should be standard.
- Disability access is incredibly important. Ramps, door push buttons, etc.
- NewMo is a wonderful service but not entirely reliable. Has seen improvements in recent months.

- Access to transit is important for those with certain disabilities. There are people with disabilities who relied on the express bus to Boston who are now in a bind.
- Shuttles could be useful to get in between villages.
- Would love to see the book mobile back for seniors.
- Transportation and housing in village centers is critical.
- Village centers would be a great place for 55+ deed restricted housing. This could be a requirement of special permits that a % of housing be 55+ deed restricted.
- City has to be proactive in generating development options through the Newton Housing Partnership. Use CPA, developer linkage fees, and land value capture to fund development.
- The rezoning process has been very upsetting. Don't understand where the impetus has come from saying we have to rezone and we have to build more housing. We don't have to do anything. We worked and put off having kids and saved money to buy our first house here. I worked hard to live here and why are people telling me that I'm elitist to live in my home and that I shouldn't live here. People are saying I shouldn't have this much space. I moved here to have space. I resent the whole thing.
- The thrust of rezoning is to give people more options, not tell someone that they shouldn't have a single family home or big yard.
- Think about rezoning as making villages more fun and inclusive.
- Would like to see more projects available to artists to display their work- in all the banks, in the storefronts.
- Pianos in the parks are wonderful.
- In Cambridge when there's construction, local artists post their work on the construction fences.
- I understand the impetus of rezoning but it's been divisive. Vision kits were not the best way to engage people. Was a waste of time and cost a lot of money.
- Don't see a lot of revitalizing village centers in what the city approves. Lots of high density housing that makes people unhappy. Don't see a vision for what we want Newton to be a leader in. There are a lot of ways to make affordable housing and support local business and the same kind of development is not always the answer. I like old houses and different architecture in different villages. Neighborhoods have a sense of community that has been established over time and how do you maintain that with the influx of new housing?
- Grew up in a garden apartment complex in NYC that was the best of both worlds, not urban or suburban.
- Afraid we're going to lose the reputation that Newton has for a fabulous school system.
- I want to see the city and elected officials deal with facts and reality. Lots of discussion of 'solving' problems- these are broad philosophical problems that can't be solved. In reality, look at cases where developers buy a home, tear it down, put up a multi-family home, and sell the units for millions of dollars. I do not feel it does anything for affordable housing.
- Heavy dose of respect for people who have lived in these neighborhoods for decades.
- Drafts of reports have talked about taking down single family homes to put in multi-family homes, civic centers, etc.

- Apartments that are currently going up in some city centers are far too expensive. They are not affordable and it is impossible to live here. City needs to build affordable housing/affordable apartments. These rents are not welcoming.
- Would like to hear what other 'groups' of people are saying. Focus groups are 'too grouped.' Do not feel the focus groups are representative enough of the 'bulk of Newton.' There have been very dominant progressive groups in past meetings and some community members have been uncomfortable.
- It seems there is a predetermined path that zoning will be taking.
- There may be unintended consequences in taking this path with density and upzoning.
- We need a lot more respect for realism. Crucial case for the Washington Street Corridor. Development is going up next to the Masonic Hall and there is not a zoning plan, just a vision plan. A large five story building should not be going up next to the Masonic Hall, it doesn't respect the building.
- Newtonville is not transit oriented. Trains run so infrequently that it seems unlikely that residents will use the trains. The Green Line is far more transit oriented.
- Residents need to be respected and welcomed.
- Rents and taxes have increased significantly.
- Don't like the stress on identity politics. Interactive survey was not good.
- It is great that the planning department has decided to approach changes in zoning and village centers based on the core values we hold.
- During the village walkaround, not a lot of values were seen. No people of color, no people of disabilities, no 2-family houses (only single-family houses), not a lot of young people with children. All of these are the opposite of what I value in the Village Center. I need a Village Center where I can walk and don't have to rely on driving. A Village Center that is reflective of Massachusetts in general. There were three apartment buildings at the walkaround which is great, but we also need 2 and 3-family homes to easily downsize in the future.
- Safe access
- Parking lots converted to outdoor patio spaces
- Would like to see Newton revise zoning districts to allow for conversion of single-family houses to 2-family houses. There was discussion about accessory apartments. The current size requirements for accessory apartments are not acceptable, they are very small. It also needs to be attached, which is not good. It needs to be revised, it is very restrictive and not very usable.
- Safety and accessibility
- Community space where people are invited to come and sit down. Sitting areas are not very comfortable to relax for a couple of hours, or read a book.
- Don't use materials that are just nice looking, they should be comfortable (no cobblestone). Make sure access and exit ways are flat.
- There is a co-op in Jamaica Plain which is a great model. 10-15 families in the co-op. There are single older adults, some young small families, racially diverse, affordable, people exercising together, it's an alternative lifestyle.
- Currently village centers look like strip malls. They should look like villages, with more flowers.

- Seating on sidewalks should face inwards, not outwards towards the traffic.
- There should be historical signs in each village with a rationale for the name- with the tribe name and original owners of each village.
- It will be nice to see younger and older people communicate. Encourage intergenerational activities. Cabot Woods is an example of where it could be done. When schools were redesigned, they were said to be community centers but that's not the case. It will be good if NewCal can be used for intergenerational activities in the future.
- Village centers should be distributed throughout the city. As someone who lives on the south side of the city, they don't really think we have a village center. I miss having a local village center and I always have to drive. I would love to be able to walk somewhere to do my errands and/or go out.
- There is a potential to move past a village center being solely a commercial center (I don't consider Needham St or Chestnut Hill actual village centers). Village centers should be more than just businesses.
- Village centers are places to gather – civically, socially, economically, etc.
- Spaces for people of all ages, multigenerational. Thinking back to the south side of the city, you could create a village center near the high school to ensure a diversity of users.
- Newton village centers need to be viewed not only within the context of Newton, but also within the context of the region. If we place our village centers into the context of the regional needs, then the village centers are the places to address the many and various regional issues we have (housing, climate change, traffic/transportation, etc.)
- Civic and cultural opportunities are necessary to improve the quality of life in Newton.

**Q2: Where do you already see these values happening in Newton's village centers?
Please provide specific examples (and specific village centers)**

- Auburndale was ravaged by the Mass Pike. There are many Victorian homes that have become two families over time. But now some are also becoming four families. They are looking to make as much money in rent as they can get. Low income people are not moving into these places.
- The traffic is very bad- we can't add more housing, it will make it all worse.
- Auburndale Cove looks very sad. Why isn't funding going to make this look better? The facilities are terrible. There is litter there.
- Newton should upgrade and restore facilities it has, not always focus on building new ones.
- The old community buildings that used to be good places to come together are not being maintained.
- Waban + Newton Highlands are on a T stop, which helps bring people in, and they have libraries and things to do. Could use more recreational activities, walking trails, and events.
- Many village centers used to be defined by churches and houses of worship. But many now have more capacity, and fewer people going to church, and the city should work with them strategically about how to use those spaces.

- The plaza next to Austin Street is a great neighborhood gathering space- it works well, and I wish Newton Center could have that kind of plaza and green space instead of the parking lot. Parking lot could go underground.
- Why was the library parking lot redone to have better drainage? It failed, it is flooding!
- City office building in Newton Center should be used for classes or events, not as city offices.
- In Oak Hill Park, we have nothing- even less than Auburndale. The former Schechter School could be used as community space, or housing. It is the only playground in the area, and that should remain open to the public.
- All of the small buildings in Oak Hill are being knocked down and replaced with McMansions, and the Schechter School shouldn't become more McMansions.
- Having a mix of different activities- classes, movies, shows, shopping, dining- is better than having just one type of store.
- Austin Street is a good example, with parking underneath and ground floor retail.
- The Lower Falls community center is an example of central community space.
- Auburndale library.
- Lincoln Street multifamily conversions. Also examples in Auburndale.
- There is a problem with voting- only a minority of people in neighborhoods are actually voting.
- A large proportion of the workforce and jobs are in healthcare, education, science, etc. I like that it's more of a cultural, artistic, and scientific city.
- I like the nineteenth century architecture and open spaces
- I don't like the electrographic signage for the marijuana dispensaries.
- There is too much commercialization.
- I don't like the term "values."
- Don't like NewCal.
- Like community centers where people can engage in zoning and planning at a local level.
- Newtonville is close- it has wider sidewalks, tables and chairs are good. Patio spaces are good. Parking lot turned into a plaza area and housing is a good example (28 Austin Street and Bram Way plaza). It is a good model for other communities as well. Newtonville has been good about building housing.
- Price of homes in Newtonville has increased due to all the new housing.
- Newtonville Village Center from Pike to High School is human-scale. The proposed 5-story building is out of scale and will change Newtonville. That property is zoned for 3 stories (CVS site). Very concerned about 5-story buildings, we should maintain human scale.
- Emphasize that we don't want any more boxes, they have no character. Don't want to see the community with 5, 6 or 17 story apartment buildings.
- Newtonville has been recently developed to have new outdoor spaces for meeting people.
- Think regionally-, we should look to Watertown which has taken a very different path to allowing development and Watertown is able to afford to pay for school and transportation investments without having to do budget overrides.

- A great example is Newberry Street in Boston. It is a great human scale. It has good design and functions well with providing ground floor amenities and upper floor businesses and residential.
- In some cases, "what was sounds like it is better than what is." Need more places for people to get daily needs served

Q3: If there was no budget, no law of physics - what would your dream Newton village center look and feel like? (This could mean preserving things that already exist, bringing things back from the past, or having something there that doesn't exist right now)

- All village centers should have a good playground, public bathrooms, dog parks, open space, and there should be a limit on a particular type of store in one area. Limit the number of banks so you can have a good mix of uses.
- Better publicity for events- big events should be plastered all over town, and it should be more creative.
- More buildings like the masonic building in Newtonville- a denser center, but with more shops, playgrounds, and stuff going on. There are too many 1 and 2 story buildings for many village centers to have a real village feel.
- There should always be public transit options.
- There should be a bus that makes a loop through all of the village centers.
- I hate driving more and more as I get older, and having better public transport would be better.
- In Newton Center- replace the parking lot with a tall building with senior housing, an arthouse movie theater, dining, underground parking, and an indoor greenhouse.
- Allow for options for intergenerational living and interaction - things like Lasell Village.
- More exciting programming in open space - for example, ranger led tours of Webster Woods.
- This whole issue came up in the Washington Street vision - dealing with the Mass Pike. One of the ideas is building over the pike - particularly for Newtonville and West Newton, though I don't know how to deal with Newton Corner. Building over it and, which would be counterintuitive, but to create more open green space so that you're really connecting the two parts. I think it's a fantastic idea and totally unfeasible.
- Walking bridges across the mass pike - but would be really really hard to pull off.
- Wondering if something could be done around the sound problem near the Pike, because it's so noisy. Especially in West Newton and Newton Corner. There's a lot of traffic coming in and out, and it's hard to attract businesses if it's an unpleasant place to be. If we could deal with things that are difficult to deter people - like the sound, like the heat islands, make it really nice, that would help. There are nice parks in Newton Corner, but who really wants to hang out there?
- Have appreciated the work done on Newtonville for the streets.
- Just so grateful to live in Newton, where I want to be careful to not ask too much. I feel like I get so much, and it's good for me to learn how to be more flexible in certain ways, because we can't have all the things we want. So I've been hanging out at 28 Austin St

plaza. Even driving by there is a nice feeling. I don't go there often enough to be bothered by the noise.

- I too have thought about parks over the pike - but I'm wary of that, because I'm thinking about a little bit for everybody. Driving into West Newton, it's nice to have a bike lane. I'm a car guy and I'm not going to give up my car, but I don't like having more traffic and congestion already. And I'm trying to imagine more parks...
- In general, I'm more focused on the Senior Center - and what I can influence there. Given that I have a good amount of professional experience working with older adults and senior centers - and as I am a senior, more and more everyday - I am aging in place in my home in Newtonville - and I look forward to being involved with the center as it develops. Again, I continue to be very grateful to be living in Newton.
- Really worried that rents are going to be higher for commercial buildings and so afraid we're going to lose some unique things. I can't imagine that the West Newton cinema will be able to afford the new rents imposed in that building. So I do think that there will be major chains moving in. I do think one thing we have in most of the villages are unique stores - I'm very afraid that they will all disappear.
- Turnpike covering - came up with a plan to do that in the 90s. And as I recall, the plan involved 5 and 7 story, or 10 story buildings. And it turns out that it was mostly wonderful buildings that they were going to put up for wonderful people and wonderful businesses - but there was very little green space. I get concerned when people start talking about building over the pike - because what I saw from the last plan was a wall that divided the city. A wall of high rise or mid-rise buildings. And I'd like to keep Newton the way it is. Having a lot of little village centers and not a big downtown is unique and I would support programs that try to keep that concept.
- On West Newton - they've tried changing the traffic pattern multiple times. But I want you to know that the new version is wonderful - just like the version that was there in 1962. So I'm not sure what will happen, those white lines will be gone by next year- they put in an island and have already figured out that it's too low so they have a cone on top of it. So I just think that the Planning Department sometimes doesn't give consideration to what happened in the past. They just want to make some changes because they think change is good.
- I don't go shopping to meet people, I go shopping to buy food. Going somewhere to walk comfortably is what I'm looking for - I have no interest in living in Allston or Brighton or those communities that have a lot of apartment buildings.
- Allan House on Weston St - I think there is a sense of community that develops around that sort of thing. I don't think it develops around the villages - I can't tell where the villages begin or end - but I think there's more of a sense of community around that area (Webster St) partly because that's a draw. And it's an interesting model. You need something to draw people in - I run into neighbors there. That gives me a sense of community. There are a couple little shops like that - Paper Mouse - but you need to have a draw. Maybe there are some new developments in Newtonville where people are hanging out and that's a bit of a draw. But Allan House - the concerts are wonderful. That's a great model.

- I've been here for 14 years. Something that helped me be a part of Newton were the community plans.
- I worked a lot in history and Newton history - what we've done since WWII is widen the streets, round out the corners, speed up things for cars - and pushed back the villages that were there before. It would be a good idea to let what was there before come back. Beware of the immediate fad. So having a variety of developments is a way of hedging our bets against the fad. Would love places where people get groceries, people live in buildings with elevators and are not limited just to cars - and use public transit or Lyft. We've always managed with one car but I would be happy to get along with zero cars.
- I think there are others in Newton who are getting older who would be happier to share buildings like that in the village centers.
- As I get older, I find it more difficult to go out for a walk. So I need to drive another car.
- That project - Allan House - is a beautiful historic renovation. Shows the value of historic renovation, plus it has green space around it, it's a fabulous spot. But one thing to think about - for me, having kids who have grown up - schools were a really key part, a central part of our community. I worked for over 30 years in Boston, so that was my professional life. But schools are really important. If we think about some of the village centers - we have schools and they're an important part of the village. For us, the high school in Newton Corner is a great facility. So one of the issues - how do we embrace the kids, the teens, who go to Newton north? You'll hear people complain about the kids, which I don't think is productive.
- I would like to see each of the villages have a similar mix of housing availability - and diversity, not just racially and ethnically and economically, but also age-wise. And I would like to see fewer banks. And see a grocery store and drug store in every village. And a park of some kind in every village. And a cafe.
- Have people enjoyed outdoor restaurants?
 - Yes
 - Yes - I think it should last forever
 - One thing we talked about on a village center tour - creating outdoor 'cafeterias' - so people could eat from all of the restaurants, a shared space to sit and eat
- Would like to see a grocery store and a café in Newton Corner. Beautiful old children's library in Farlow park is in need of restoration and would love to see it as a community center.
- Expanding and renovating the Lower Falls community center.
- Improved recreation facilities for all Newton Residents like what was built in Wellesley so you don't have to pay exorbitant gym fees.
- Parks need attention.
- Put money towards open space and green space instead of being swallowed up by new housing developments. Seniors don't necessarily want to move to these buildings, they want to age in place.
- Conversions to multifamily housing like Lincoln Street Victorians (has also happened in Auburndale). Have seen a number of large old single family homes converted to two and three units and they fit right in the neighborhood.

- I had plans to sell an old Victorian single family home but we were able to convert into a second unit for our grown son.
- What is the old library building in Newton Centre being used for now? Nobody knows anything about it.
- Hut building at Mason Rice is an ideal building for community uses and is rotting in place.
- Get rid of Trio on Washington St.
- Up-scale restaurants are not welcoming. People don't want to spend \$25 on pizza.
- Want village centers to be clean. Village centers near high schools get trashed at lunch time. There needs to be more partnership with the city and schools to keep village centers clean in the spring and fall and free of snow in the winter. Other cities do much better at clearing snow and keeping streets clean.
- Walkable village centers, more stores, more restaurant options.
- There had been a lot of discussion about what would go into the old Peet's location. There are too many banks in that area now.
- Walkable, clean, and clear streets and sidewalks.
- Need to encourage more diversity in what businesses come in.
- I like the idea of preserving the kind of style that Newton has and a quiet, slower approach to modernization. Some feel in the dark about what zoning is.
- View the village centers as a destination. Things to do, appointments to attend, etc. We're not going to get the traffic we want if we don't address parking issues in the village centers. Can't make village centers vibrant without addressing this issue first.
- Would like for the city to expand the Senior Center by purchasing the building/church next door/across the street. Need more rat control at the senior center.
- Would like to see more charging stations for folks with electric cars. Glad that the city is electrifying its own fleet and would like to see the city offer incentives for individuals.
- Would like a bagel and a bookstore.
- Newton Highlands needs a serious redo. Undergrounding utilities and cables, and all the things available now in Newtonville.
- Change zoning to disincentive tear downs and incentivize reusing and rehabbing.
- Tree ordinance is toothless and does not extend into all trees in the city. Property owners just tear down all the trees when they tear down buildings.
- Lots of businesses, only 2 banks, lots of places with tables outside, not just for cafeterias but also for art etc., and second story housing.
- Mixed-use, a street with no traffic, like a mall where you could walk with cars in the back area.
- Connection to public transportation is important.
- It would look like a village in England.
- Human scale, it only takes a few 4-5 story buildings to create a canyon effect.
- Maybe a pedestrian mall on side streets but not on the main street because of traffic patterns. If there's no parking, then businesses can't survive.
- Gigantic mansions are not human scale and not good for neighborhood character, and they need to be addressed.
- We are fortunate to have T going through Newton, but it is not accessible.

- 2 and 3 family dwellings – close to T stations.
- Zoning code is promoting flat roofed buildings, it is changing the character of the city and needs to be addressed.
- Access to commuter rail needs to be addressed. Why don't we have an elevator shaft? Ridership on express buses is higher because it is more convenient. Commuter rail is good if it meets your schedule, and you can take the stairs.
- When it comes to West Newton I would redirect the traffic, which is terrible.
- Green space, particularly that allows for socializing.
- Upgrade the movie theater in West Newton.
- You need to have adequate parking, even though I want village centers to be walkable. Particularly for seniors who are not going to hop on a bicycle.
- But also, seniors won't be driving either, so we need things like NewMo...but bigger and broader. Not just transportation within Newton but also to other places in the region.
- NewMo and other transit services should be expanded.
- Spaces for nightlife. Families are constrained by children, but seniors are not and "we don't all want to eat dinner at 5:30 and go to bed at 8pm."
- If we do push for nightlife, our village centers will become hubs bringing in people who live outside of Newton.
- Village centers are more suited to apartments and more housing than allowing more multi-family housing on residential streets in the neighborhoods.
- New traffic pattern in Waban to make the crossing of Beacon Street easier.
- Large parking lot behind Waban Square should be developed as something (community space, housing, etc.)
- I would love to see a movie theater in each village.

Q4: How can the city better engage older adults of Newton?

- The senior center does a good job getting word out and offering programs.
- Mayor's newsletter, sandwich boards.
- Make a once a month flier that goes to everyone in Newton focusing just on events.
- Older citizens have been here a long time and have invested in Newton. Doing things that older citizens don't want or may jeopardize them financially is not a good idea. Hard to get people engaged unless it affects their next door but the city has to do better.
- There should be a scientific survey that questions every adult living in Newton that questions and floats some of the ideas represented here.
- Should have this kind of focus meeting in the early evenings rather than the early afternoons. This meeting is missing a huge number of seniors who are missing.
- Don't like the idea of being grouped as a senior. Would like a broader group like this to understand more of what other people think. Too few people in this group.
- It is so important to bring all the groups together. This group should not just be older adults because crosstalk between different groups of people is important.
- Wish that when seniors called City Hall, people would call back.
- It's wrong to assume that people who cannot attend meetings don't care. Hopeful for a general consensus.

- Caution anyone in the city when using Zoom. Easier for folks to talk to each other in person. Zoom is not the greatest. Would prefer to do this in a real way.
- A regular community meeting, maybe biweekly. Sometimes Zoom meetings or maybe at Village Centers to engage pedestrians in conversations. Some other participants said Zoom is better due to social distancing and convenience too.
- Open office-hours
- Engage with Area Councils
- Polling tool was not a good outreach tool. There should be a well-constructed scientific poll.
- Public hearings through ZAP don't happen much, it's a very insular process.
- Not many people engaged in Vision Kits, maybe around 300-500 out of 85,000 population, which is not enough.
- Regular emails are good
- Councilor Emily Norton holds a meeting every month, which is helpful to get updates. Other Councilors could do something similar.
- I do go to the Senior Center, but I don't talk about Citywide issues there.
- The Senior Center and the Mayor's newsletter are great resources.
- I wish we had a worthwhile local paper. The TAB is not good anymore.
- Shovel the sidewalks in the winter. Because they often aren't.
- Sidewalks as well - repair the sidewalks.
- Not just the 1 new building - but multiple programs that are more spread out around the city.

Next Steps

The community findings from these focus groups will be compiled with the other forms of village center engagement and quantitative analyses to establish synthesized community desired outcomes to assist the City Council in determining policy. If you have any questions on this report, please email zoningredesign@newtonma.gov.

Project Summary

The City of Newton Planning & Development Department held a series of 12 focus groups between May and September 2021 as part of the overall engagement and outreach for the [Zoning Redesign: Village Centers project](#). This phase of the ongoing Zoning Redesign project focusing on village centers began by asking Newton community members to share their experiences of and their future visions for their village centers. The input gathered will help the City of Newton identify areas of research for how to update the zoning for village centers.

Eight focus groups were identified to further equitable engagement in an effort to facilitate outreach with groups of the Newton community that have been underrepresented in our past engagement efforts. When possible, these sessions were co-facilitated with the appropriate Newton board or commission, like the Commission on Disability, Youth Commission, Council on Aging, the Human Rights Commission, and the Newton Housing Authority. Four focus groups were identified for the village center economic development communities, which were co-facilitated by the Newton Economic Development Commission and our consultant, Utile.

Introduction

City staff and the Office of Cultural Development held the Creative Communities focus group on June 25, 2021. 35 people expressed interest in participating through the Focus Group Interest Form. In total this focus group had:

- 10 focus group participants

These sessions were not recorded in order for participants to feel comfortable and speak freely. What follows below are the “raw” notes compiled by the focus group notetakers and co-facilitators.

There is no demographic data provided here because the Census does not capture who identifies as part of a ‘creative community’ as defined by the Office of Cultural Development for this focus group.

Focus Group Notes

Q 1: Are there places in village centers that creatively engage you? Please be specific and tell us how they engage you?

- Newtonville is one of the more diverse locations in the city and the art (mural) in the Bram Way is helping to facilitate that. The Bram Way could be a model for other villages. Art changes the landscape in really positive ways.

- In Newtonville - The Bram Way Plaza and the New Art Center pop-up space/exhibition has been a great way to engage with friends and visitors. Hopeful that this idea spreads into other parts of Newton and other villages.
- There's a lot of trash, debris, and mess in Newton Centre and also Newtonville. Appreciation for the new style of benches in Newtonville. It's disappointing that the newspaper is diminishing and was recently cut from Newtonville. There's not enough communication, there should be better communication throughout the City in general. West Newton center has a lot of traffic problems and cracked concrete and bad benches.
- Newtonville Bramway is wonderful to sit in. The West Newton village could be more enlivened. The 'doors' make things much more lively in the park in West Newton (and also all over). Planters and benches could be made into artworks. Get artists to help design and make them works of art. Street fixtures could also be turned into art.
- Newton Centre, I think of the most - but I would say my engagement there is limited. Sometimes there will be a band playing at the bar on union street or limitedly on the green; I would love for a place like a maker's space, or a community - not aware of the programming there - a place for groups to meet to develop hobbies or skills - not a lot of places where you can just go to hang out, mostly banks. Love to see more community-oriented spaces
- In Newton Centre: I'm taking a tai-chi class at the Newton Centre playground, the bandshell and the Hyde has musical events + movies - problem for us are mosquitos at night.
- In West Newton - newton cultural alliance just finished renovating the Nathaniel Allen house, and it's supposed to have space for things like music events and won't know how available that will be, but certainly hope so.
- Couple of fun great outdoor places - so spring/summer, maybe fall - but no place like those for the rest of the year. Allen House is gorgeous, but they charge by the hour. We can't afford to be there. I was in talks with them for a long time - but once I heard the fee, our small theatre company cannot pay for every hour of rehearsal. We're still looking. Organizations that have a lot of money - who is that? So, for me, the search continues for a civic space - a space that's underutilized, a space where we can gather and do some art.
- Maker's space - the library has a maker's space, it's not reopened yet, but that was a great location, and I was in a small arts group that would meet regularly in the makerspace at the library.
- I totally agree with what's being said - we've been suffering through the pandemic which has also really affected our access to indoor space. So, war memorial space at Newton Hall - has always been a well utilized space. Have always used that for my ukulele group. Had our rehearsals, great experience.
- Live on West Newton/ Newtonville line - space that the city built down in the Bram Way, where we have the closed off area with tables between Starbucks and Caffè Nero, and there's a huge mural there - and now two outdoor doors there - I always go there, always busy, every table, there's a lot of good vibe, I feel engaged in that village when I'm sitting there, amongst the art and people, love that gathering space

- Tiny space at Bram Way but very welcoming. But I will go to CVS, I will go to the city market or something like that, in one place, and I can do a few things. But it's tiny and there's no shade. It's not a beautiful space, there are just tables and chairs, open to people. Would much prefer something with trees for shade. But it's tiny, are there 20 chairs there?
- Little thing in Newton Centre - picnic tables - gets occupied quite quickly and people leave their trash
- I live in Newton Centre and I find that I don't do very much in Newton Centre - I go to the post office, sandwich works. Not really a coffee shop to hang out. I know Tatte is coming and Tour de Jour - I like finding places that I can go and buy a sandwich for less than \$13, so I feel very uninspired by Newton Centre. Can't walk to get groceries, can't go to a bakery.
- About arts in Newton Centre - are tremendous economic drivers for businesses, never totally felt that people have really understood the importance of the arts. When we were looking for places to get a special permit, usually a parking waiver we needed - restaurants were getting them right and left but not arts groups - councilor told me not to ask about this for 5 years.
- War memorial is great but so echoey. Loved the library space but it's small. And whole thing we're told with the schools - "well that's the school and not the city"
- At least Newton Highlands as some more affordable things to walk into
- Hyde Center is another example of that, people go there, it's a central focus
- Mostly I go and do things in Brookline - where I feel like I can get those things - get multiple needs addressed at once.
- Newton outdoors - in conjunction with the city, community pride put together OutDoors. 2-4 of those doors in each village center, encouraging people to walk around + public art display. Encourage economic vitality by using public art as a vehicle.
- Having a gallery in Newton Centre would be really cool - or one that had frequent openings - even if it had a space to make art too. That would be so cool. We don't really have a dedicated space for that in Newton Centre, and I can imagine it would be hard to sustain financially - so the city should invest in stuff like that.
- Was looking at the New Art Centre classes and they're so expensive. There's no way I could afford to do one of them. So, having places where art classes are more affordable would do a lot to make them more accessible.
- I'm theatre but the public art - every time I see a door, I get happy. I love the painted barriers. And whenever someone asks me to have a meeting, I say 'Caffe Nero.' it's that vibrancy, the energy - so public art, a gathering space where you can have coffee and people watch, brings people in. I will say, meet me at Caffe Nero because of the experience.
- Feels very European there.
- New gallery just opened in Newton Centre

Q 2: How are village centers currently encouraging creative practices?

- NCP has been doing a great job (Newton AI Fresco/Newton OutDoors). There's no consideration from the City about how to get municipal departments

(engineers/architects) to make street fixtures as works of art. Approached City previously and was shot down. There was no conversation or openness to incorporate art into the City landscape.

- Shoe barn, all-inclusive area that's really inspiring
- More of what they did on union street in Newton Centre to block off half of the traffic. What if that was all pedestrian? I sometimes park in that parking lot. Imagine that's a green space where anything could happen. What an incredible gathering space. Less cars though I know we need parking. But NewMo - wow, what if we were able to use that and it brings us to the village centers!
- Utilizing space that's in the center of Newton Centre - if we had festivals or events that took up that whole space; that would definitely do a lot to engage people
- Love being out in the villages, in the community, for outdoor performances. You need a sound system - need to have access to electricity to make these things happen. Love the Hyde- would love to take the Hyde and make it 3 times as big and put it in the bowl of Newton Centre - it is the green space behind Mason Rice school, on the flat grassy area. Because of Covid, that's where I moved the outdoor concerts. Would love to see a permanent performance pavilion there, fully supported with lights, tech capability, etc.
- A lot more mural art and semi-permanent public art. So, if we could encourage the city to be supportive of landlords or city space to display mural art. Sure that community pride could find the artists and do the fundraising towards that. Even in cities in the Boston area - like Salem or New Bedford - there are murals everywhere. They are so vibrant and exciting. Really generate a lot of energy + pedestrian economic vitality.

Q 3: What would a more 'creative' village center look and feel like? You can be as specific or dream as big as you'd like.

- The arts and culture should be considered as part of the economic plan as much as physical infrastructure. Many other communities have creative/painted crosswalks. Let's think about reimagining infrastructure projects creative and with an artist perspective.
- Having recently looked at a lot of the villages with a creative eye (in reference to the 'doors') it's necessary to be thinking about creative placemaking in ways to draw the public in with seating and entry ways. There's disjointed thinking for instance in designing streets and parks. They bump into one another and are not thought about one collectively, only separately.
- Private funding is vital to create the public engagement for creative placemaking.
- The City needs to think creatively about development not only physically but also the funding sources.
- Reallocating funds from some City projects should go to art. Heard somewhere that it costs the City \$1,000 to plant 1 tree. Maybe there could be ways to cut spending in some departments and allocate it to public art.
- City Hall has shut down the idea of "creative crosswalks" when presented to the City. It's frustrating. Was told it was not possible and that was it.
- There should be much more collaboration of municipal projects with artists. Artists should be part of the plan from the beginning, not as an afterthought. Projects should be considered with art/creativity in mind.

- There needs to be more performance art in open/public spaces. Wandering into villages and finding cultural experiences right there (instead of going into Boston) is important to keep engagement and focus local. We should enliven spaces with performance and music.
- There should be an Artist in Residence in the City. This would help make arts/culture immersed and break down barriers for artists to make/create art in the City.
- We should be tapping into youth/High School students more into thinking civically and creatively.
- Newton should have an amphitheater outside. Why can't we have performers and music outside in a designated space? Maybe bookstores could have author talks even? Political candidates, lectures, etc. could all use these outdoor spaces to engage the public. We have satellite places that could be engaged more. Some parks are underutilized.
- Changeability is a big part of enlivening a place. There's something about temporary pieces of public art that CHANGES and involves people and engages people that's not static and permanent and people get immune to.
- The City should be able to issue busking licenses so that music CAN be accessible in all these open spaces.
- Newton Highlands has the Hyde Community Center that allows them to have these community events which is great. Having a dedicated person in each village who can spearhead cultural activities - it makes a difference. Having the physical space will encourage people to take ownership over pushing cultural experiences forward.
- In terms of zoning, there needs to be forethought and purpose in defining cultural spaces. Trio exhibition spaces were an afterthought.
- Unused churches should be repurposed into cultural spaces.

Q 4: Is there anything else about village centers that you want the city to consider? (For example, the environment, accessibility, housing, inclusivity, transportation, and more.)

- I'm concerned that Newtonville is pegged as a transportation hub. There's no transit capacity to put T platforms in Newtonville. I wouldn't rely on the fact that people will increase their use of the T. 40% of workers don't want to go back to work. It may be good for other villages, but not for Newtonville.
- The City makes art an afterthought in their budgeting. There's SO much benefit to putting the arts/artists as a priority in the City. There needs to be a more serious look to FUNDING arts and culture from the City.
- Green spaces could use more art. Infrastructure (bridges) could be memorable if we make them works of art.
- Arts need to be more generously funded. Also, other cities have a public art commission or plan, and Newton doesn't. Having a public art ordinance would make all of the challenges discussed today key to solving them.
- We need the City to be less reactive to complaints and hold strong onto keeping art in our places (EX: Blackboard in West Newton).
- The weather in New England is a consideration, but that shouldn't stop us from engaging creatively! They do it in Toronto, CAN. We can deal with the weather.

- Housing - there's nobody my age who lives here who doesn't live with their parents, it's just impossible. That's a big barrier to newer artists moving here and having a more diverse + artistic community. So exclusive here, limits our chances to grow
- Second that. More than anything, more than vibrant arts centers - for me, is affordable housing. It's shameful that we don't have enough of it in Newton - so we can have all this awesome art but it's for a very small group of people. That's why I got involved with this in the beginning
- When we have affordable housing, it's not affordable enough. The median income here is so high that even if you have 50-80% of median income, that's actually relatively high. We need a bunch of affordable housing that is at a lower economic level. We're basically redlining out people who make less money. 80 to 100% of the median income is usually what's called 'affordable' -
- Live right in the middle of Newton Centre - within 2 blocks of my house, at least 7 homes were 'naturally affordable' - that had become condos, 2 condos usually - always expanded into the property - and they sell for over 1.5 million homes each. Talking about what were multi-family dwellings and were somewhat affordable. I don't know how that stops - nobody's breaking any rules or anything. But those were naturally affordable places. Where 3 people who were fresh out of college/grad school would get an apartment together. A lot of times those people are doing arts. So affordable housing concerns me - I could never move to Newton now, never never never. So that concerns me that my colleagues can't move here, can't send their kids to the newton schools.
- Apartments above retail would be awesome in Newton Centre

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